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The purpose of this study was twofold: (1) to develop and implement a participative unitary appreciative inquiry group for women who wished to explore their experience of midlife transition, and (2) to develop a profile that expressed the life patterning of women, both individually and collectively, that emerged from the process. Cowling's (2010) method of inquiry, participative unitary appreciative inquiry (PAUI), derived out of the conceptual foundation of Rogers' Science of Unitary Human Beings, provided the orientation, the process for exploration, and a way for viewing and making sense of the results called synopsis.

Ten (10) women ranging in ages 50 to 66 years participated in the study. Eight were Euro-American and two were African American. The average years of education of the group were 14 years. Eight of the ten were employed full-time.

Patterning was manifested uniquely by each woman though underlying themes emerged that were common across the cases. Most predominate was that the transition of midlife is a crossroads in life's journey where one comes face to face with her relative past, present and future. Transition is the point where transformation may be experienced through realization of one's ability to willingly participate and direct the changes that are occurring.

LIFE PATTERNING OF WOMEN IN MIDLIFE TRANSITION

by

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Approved by

Committee Chair

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In Dedication To

..... Roland, my husband, whose unwavering support held me upright when I would threaten to fall. He never stopped believing in me, my work and my ability to complete it.

..... Andrew, my son, who when discouragement threaten to drown me, was my champion by reminding me to “just keep swimming.”

..... the women in my life whose shared experiences started me on this journey of discovery and who encouraged me along the way. Their questions have become my questions and in the search for answers I have found my place in this world. Especially,

Magdalene Hayes (my mom)

Lisa Jennings

Melissa Grozier

Judy West

All the women in this study

“Though I may not know the answers, I can finally say I’m free;

For if the questions brought me here, I am who I was born to be.”

Todd Rundgren/Susan Boyles

APPROVAL PAGE

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Appreciation is a wonderful thing. It makes what's excellent in others belong to us as well.

Voltaire

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Mid-life or middle age for women is considered to be between the ages of 35 to 65 years (Grossman & Mandle, 2006). According to the 2001 U. S. Census, 38% of the female population is between the ages of 35 to 65 years (U. S. Census, 2005). Increasing numbers of women entering the middle age years coupled with their increase in longevity imply a higher likelihood of more women experiencing the transition of midlife. Regardless of the fact that this represents a span of 30 years and at least three developmental stages, description of the midlife years has primarily been confined to biomedical symptoms assigned by objective or measurable means. Little or no consideration has been given to how the experience might be unique to individual women. Almost one third of women within this stage of life will consult a doctor every year for menopausal issues such as vasomotor and mood symptoms and as the symptoms increase so will the frequency of doctor's visits (Guthrie, Dennerstein, Taffe, & Donnelly, 2004). In addition, "sleep disturbances and depression are strongly associated with hot flushes in menopausal women and together with hot flushes and mood disturbance, are the primary symptoms leading most menopausal women to seek medical care" (Joffe, Soares, & Cohen, 2003, p. 563). It is estimated that as women complete the transition to menopause, 85% of women report one or more symptoms such as hot - flashes, depressed mood, or sleep disruptions that prompt 10% of women to see a health

care provider (Woods & Mitchell, 2005). Viewing midlife through the biomedical lens gives only a partial picture of the transition that is occurring in women in midlife.

The old axiom, the “only constant is change” applies to no group or individual more vividly than a woman during midlife. While her body undergoes physical changes she simultaneously may juggle her changing roles as career woman, daughter, mother, and caregiver. Women define themselves based on the roles they fulfill to those around them resulting in a categorical or fragmented picture of self. At midlife, an unsettling occurs that calls to question the previous view of self. Recognizing the changes that are going on within and around her, the world as she knows it begins to be less tethered to the old paradigms and becomes unsettled as she enters the uncharted waters of her future.

Choi (1995) asserted that how a woman reacts to this transitional period is dependent upon many factors but is particularly related to the importance she places on it. The concept of midlife is not universal as its roots lie within the historical and social conditions specific to the individual or groups of women (Arpanantikul, 2004). These differing conditions can affect the meaning given by women to their experience of midlife. The meaning placed on the experiences may be influenced by the perceptions of and definition given to it by the dominating social order within which she lives. If the dominant social order emphasizes and promotes the biomedical view of midlife transition, i. e. as a deficiency disease, women will take on that view of midlife transition. Therefore, it would stand to reason that if the dominant social order, defined in this context as the medical community, were to view midlife through a unifying lens, women would be enabled to do the same. It becomes important to women to find ways to

recognize the broader context of midlife transition in order to anticipate changes that are occurring and be empowered to direct that change. It is equally important for the health care provider to recognize the patterning of the mid-life transition of women in order to best facilitate the transition and to meet their individual needs (Banister, 1999).

While midlife women have been the informants and subjects of menopausal studies, the methods of inquiry have as their foundational approach the scientific method that reduces observations to a mere set of concrete variables that are quantitatively measured (Im, Meleis, & Park, 1999; Lindh-Astrand, Hoffman, Hammer, & Kjellgren, 2007; Montgomery, 2005; Santoro, 2005; Seibold, Richards, & Simon, 1994; Sherman, 2005; Wright, 1998). Even attempts of qualitative work in the area have a focus of study that is placed within the context of the midlife time frame, but not within the experience of the woman. In a review of numerous Asian studies, Im, Meleis, & Park, (1999) compared the experience of symptoms of menopause between Asian and Western midlife women. However, the full experiences of these women could not be discovered due to the constraints inherent in the research methodology as well as in the androcentric views and biologic perspectives of menopause held by Western thought. These research methodologies belie the nature of women's knowing and thinking (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Surrey, 1991) known to be crucial to women's overall development. Therefore, only a partial view of the transition viewed as acceptable by societal constructs is available to women.

The emergence of a plethora of women's stories, self-help guides and websites offering online support groups to women reflects not only that women want to know

more about the transition of midlife but might indicate the dissatisfaction women have with how this transition is being defined by society. An online search for books on the topic of midlife at two major vendor sites, Barnes & Noble.com and Amazon.com, resulted in 5500 items indicating an implied desire of women to find answers to their questions about self and purpose. Of those, 48 were related specifically to hormonal therapy, 326 to relief of anxiety and stress using exercise, and 34 related to menopause. Narrowing the search focus to specifically women in midlife transition resulted in only seven listings. The implication from this finding supports the view that current literature limits the parameters within which women might find information about the experiences of their transition.

None of the sources identified addressed the transition of midlife from the perspective of the whole person particularly in her relationship to herself and her world. Each was either an individual accounting of struggles that occurred during the transition or suggestions on how to deal with the biological changes. Each of the different viewpoints (from the types of literature available and accessible) becomes another fragmented piece of information related to the transition (described or interpreted) by someone else. Unfortunately, none of these addressed the issues of midlife through a unifying lens. Most implied the transition occurs as a linear progression within a period of time that is self limiting, having a starting and an ending point. The literature failed to address the transition as a process of continuous change with great potential for transformation.

Unitary View of Midlife Transition

Viewing women's transition of midlife as a transformative process requires viewing the transition through a unitary lens that recognizes midlife in its wholeness rather than fragmented parts. The unitary-transformative lens requires that human existence be acknowledged as complex and multidimensional that cannot be captured and held within the boundaries of categories. A unitary lens denies a static, linear view of events occurring in chronological time. Rather it provides a wide-angle view that recognizes human development as an evolving and an involving of self, environment, and others in relationship. From the standpoint of unitary thinking, every experience of the individual is important as contributing to the essence of individual patterning. Midlife transition is seen as a patterning of the whole and the individual descriptions of events or experiences such as physical symptoms, cognitive changes, emotional, spiritual and relational changes are merely facets of patterning of the midlife. No one facet is the center of focus, has greater importance, nor entertains a position of causality of any other facet. Viewing the transition as patterning honors the woman as whole as she actively participates in the changes that are occurring.

The science of unitary human beings (Rogers, 1992) provided the conceptual framework within which to view patterning and transition for this study. Within this paradigm, individuals and environment are energy fields inextricably linked, and expressed through field patterning. Neither can be viewed separately or essentially known by its individual parts and therefore are considered to be inherently whole. Transition was experienced as change within the mutual process of the human – environmental energy

field that is continuous, innovative, unpredictable, and evolutionary. Therefore, for this study, midlife transition for women was defined as a process of continual, multidimensional, and evolutionary change experienced through the context of their life situations and expressed through recognizable patterning.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the life patterning of women in the process of midlife transition employing a research methodology aimed at appreciating the wholeness of human life. It involved the development and implementation of a participative unitary appreciative inquiry group for women who wished to explore midlife transition. The outcome of the study was a profile that expressed the life patterning of women in midlife transition, both individually and collectively that emerged from the process. Midlife transition is a complex phenomenon that expresses itself in individual women as identifiable life patterning. In addition, similarities in the experience of patterning among women suggest a common patterning that is recognizable and can be anticipated. Exploration and discovery of this patterning provided greater understanding of this crucial period in a woman's life.

The research questions for this study were: (1) What is the individual life patterning of women in midlife transition that emerges out of a participative unitary appreciative inquiry group process for women exploring their experiences of midlife? and (2) What is the collective life patterning of women in midlife transition that emerges out of a participative unitary appreciative group process for women exploring their midlife

experiences? The unitary appreciative inquiry method employed in this study enabled the researcher and women participants to openly explore the nature of each woman's experience beyond a medical and normative context. It was anticipated that the findings would contribute to knowledge useful to the discipline of nursing particularly those providing care to women in transition. This method provided an opportunity for women to share their experience of the midlife process in a holistic way that captures the natural progression and evolution of life beyond the biomedical-psychosocial perspective.

Participative Unitary Appreciative Inquiry

The methodology used for this study was Cowling's (2001) Participative Unitary Appreciative Inquiry (PUAI). Arising from Roger's Science of Unitary Human Beings (Rogers, 1992), this method of inquiry "seeks to know the wholeness, uniqueness, and essence of human life and provides a way of identifying patterning that reflects it" (Cowling, 2001, p. 33). The approach is consistent with many of the principles of feminist research and parallels can be seen within the elements of the PUAI process. These elements are that appreciative knowing is participatory, synoptic, and transformative. This type of knowing does not seek absolutes, rather it embraces that which can never be fully known or described with language or diagnoses. However, it does provide a way of identifying "a pattern that reflects the wholeness, uniqueness, and essence of the individual or the group" (Cowling, 2001, p.34). This type of knowing is consistent with the principles of feminist research in that both are concerned with understanding human life conditions and situations that are transformative and affirming.

Population/Sampling

The purposive sample consisted of women over 18 years of age (age of consent) who self-identified as being in midlife transition. Even though the literature places the age range for midlife in women at 35 to 65 years of age, placing this parameter on the population and hence the sample, would undermine the unitary assumption that change is evolutionary, nonlinear and is unconstrained by the idea of the chronological time. Sample size of six to twelve is said to be adequate for this type of study (Heron & Reason, 2005). A target of ten participants was anticipated.

Significance

The study findings have important implications for women, nursing and healthcare, and holistic research methods. The study created a unique opportunity for women to explore midlife in a holistic way that validated the personal and unique dimensions of this experience for the women involved. This responded to the need for women to have knowledge about the midlife process that takes their understanding beyond the fragmentation of the medical sciences. It was grounded in the voices of women participants and validated their own way of thinking described as relational in social feminist literature. Thus the form of knowledge generated by this project extended what is known by nursing and other health care sciences that might be more sensitive to women's concerns. In addition, as nurses are concerned with clients during transitions, knowing more about this particular one will allow them to be more open to the

opportunities to care for women experiencing midlife. It was anticipated that conduct of this study would also help refine and strengthen the unitary appreciative inquiry research method as it incorporates credibility and legitimacy standards in its implementation.

Summary

Midlife transition is an inevitable process for women should they live between the ages of 35 and 65 years. Research to date has focused on symptomatology that occurs as a result of biological changes and responses to those changes based on current societal constructs. This study took a different tact that acknowledged women as expert knowers of their own lives and provides a way to explore their stories of midlife. By studying the process of midlife transition, these women gained greater insight into their lives and experiences. As nurses are involved with clients as facilitators of movement through transition, their practice may be informed to be more sensitive to the holistic care of women during this process at midlife.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Research in the area of midlife transition in women has explicated the symptoms experienced during premenopause and postmenopause, but have dichotomized the transition between the point at which symptoms are present or not. In addition, these studies imply that the experiences at any of these life stages are generally the same for all women. What they have failed to address is that while experiencing the process might be inevitable for women, how they experience the transition and the meaning given to it are uniquely individual. In addition, studies have been framed from fragmenting perspectives that are rarely holistic.

Even the language used, “menopausal transition” to refer to a process is misleading. Discussions among women imply menopause (or the cessation of menses) to be the end of a process of transition that is dreaded by some and celebrated by others (Woods & Mitchell, 2005). This implies that women recognize there is a time in their lives between having menses and not having menses that is important. It is sometimes viewed as a period in women’s lives filled with complexity and diversity (Avis, Brockwell, & Colvin 2005). Others have proclaimed it a complex period in women’s lives in which hormonal factors, family and personal relationships, work status and self - concept change (Matthews & Bromberger, 2005). However, over the past several years much has been

learned about menopause as a transitional stage of development. For example, menopause transition is now defined by stages based on menstrual cycles and their regularity rather than a particular age group. (Avis, et al., 2005; Matthews & Bromberger, 2005; Santoro, N., 2005; Sherman, S., 2005; Woods & Mitchell, 2005; Fuh, Wang, Lee, Lu, & Juang, 2003; Gold, Bromberger, Crawford, Samuels, Gendle, Harlow, & Skurnick, 2001). While this change in definition has resulted in a broader view of the transition, a more accurate way of referring to the transition as a process of midlife is emerging within the literature. However, when reviewing the literature, sometimes the two concepts, menopause and midlife transition are still used interchangeably. The concept of midlife transition captures the nature of the process of development and evolution that is holistic and not entirely related to a biological event.

In this chapter, what is currently known in the literature about midlife transition in women will be explored and gaps in that knowledge will be explicated. In addition, unitary pattern will be explored as a perspective from which to view the transition as a complex and multidimensional process that is dynamic with potential for transformation. Finally, what is currently known about the life patterning of women experiencing midlife transition along with need for further research will be described.

Midlife Transition in Women

Midlife or middle age for women is considered to be between the ages of 35- 65 years (Grossman & Mandle, 2006). According to the 2001 U. S. Census, 38% of the female population is between the ages of 35 to 65 years (U. S. Census, 2005). Increasing

numbers of women entering the middle age years coupled with their increase in longevity imply a higher likelihood of more women experiencing the transition of midlife.

Regardless of the fact that this represents a span of 30 years and at least three developmental stages, description of the midlife years has primarily been confined to symptoms assigned by objective or measurable means. There has been little to no consideration given to how the experience might be unique to the individual woman.

Almost one third of women within this stage of life will consult a doctor every year for menopausal issues such as vasomotor and mood symptoms and as the symptoms increase so will the frequency of doctor's visits. (Guthrie, Dennerstein, Taffe, & Donnelly, 2004) In addition,

sleep disturbances and depression are strongly associated with hot flushes in menopausal women and together with hot flushes and mood disturbance, are the primary symptoms leading most menopausal women to seek medical care (Joffe, Soares, & Cohen, 2003, p. 563).

It is estimated that as they complete the transition to menopause, 85% of women report one or more symptoms such as hot-flashes, depressed mood, or sleep disruptions that prompt 10% of women to see a health care provider (Woods & Mitchell, 2005).

Choi (1995) asserted that how a woman reacts to this transitional period is dependent upon many factors but is particularly related to the importance she places on it. The concept of midlife is not universal as its roots lie within the historical and social conditions specific to the individual or groups of women (Arpanantikul, 2004; Chirawatkul, Patanasri, & Koochaiyasit, 2002; Carolan, 2000). These differing conditions can affect the meaning given by women to their experience of midlife.

According to Olazabal, Paigua, and Luengo (1999), three different and prevailing perspectives through which to view midlife transition currently exist. These include the biological/medical model, the psychosocial model, and the holistic model. Examination of each is important in discovering its contribution to current knowledge of this period in women's lives. In addition, from a developmental perspective, the life course/span/cycle models and their influence on the study of midlife will be addressed.

Biological/medical model

The biological/medical model is one which researchers are most familiar and whose results are widely known. This model assumes that the midlife transition is one of a state of deficiency whose only remedy is that of life-long treatment (Lindh-Astrand, et al., 2007). "Deficiency Disease" was a term first coined by Dr. Robert Wilson in his book *Feminine Forever* (Wright, 1998). In it he supported the argument for hormone replacement therapy (HRT) asserting that physiological changes such as aging ovarian function and a progressive decline in reproductive hormones caused menopausal symptoms. He claimed this problem was a "preventable and curable deficiency disease" (Wright, 1998, p.47). Since the advent of HRT studies related to menopausal transition, research has continued that generally focuses on the cause and/or relief of symptoms. Wright (1998) referred to this as the medicalization of the menopause transition where the perception of an otherwise normal event is now one seen as abnormal and requiring inevitable treatment.

In 2005, multiple studies related to midlife transition, but referred to as "menopausal transition", were presented at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) State of the Science

Conference on Management of Menopause Related Symptoms. Of these, four were based on biomedical model. These included strategies to improve fertility in midlife women experiencing midlife changes (Santoro, 2005); strategies for managing menopausal symptoms in diverse populations addressing ethnic and racial diversity (Montgomery, 2005); and defining the menopausal transition with respect to reproductive aging (Sherman, 2005). Only one study examining the prevalence and severity of symptoms during the perimenopause concluded that even though menopausal symptoms can be measured and treated, the significance of the symptoms remains relatively unstudied (Woods & Mitchell, 2005).

Generally speaking, the concept of menopause and midlife transition has been defined in non-Western cultures as a natural event and has held little significance within the context of their daily lives. However, the trend has begun to change as values and attitudes in certain countries are becoming more influenced by the Western world. Arpanantikul (2004) found in her study of midlife experiences among Thai women that middle age was now being viewed as a marker of decline and that menopause was a “disruptive event requiring help from medical personnel” (p. 55). Another study on midlife women in northeast Thailand, or Issan, supported the finding that for them, old age was being considered negatively and that menopause was regarded as a sign of being old (Chirawatkul, Patanasri & Kooshaiyasit, 2002). Traditionally menopause was seen as a natural event of aging and considered a point of positive role and status change in Korean women. However, Im & Meleis (2000) found in their study of Korean immigrant women in the United States that while menopause was viewed as aging, it carried with it

negative images of physical limitations, ugly appearances, decreasing work capability, greater financial dependency and feelings of hopelessness. In a study comparing menopausal symptoms experienced by Australian and Japanese women, Anderson, Yoshizawa, Gollschewski, Atogami & Courtney (2004) found that Japanese women who traditionally found menopause to be of little consequence, were reporting somatic complaints, psychological and sexual symptoms with more frequency than the Australian women, particularly after menopause. In their review of numerous Asian studies from 1983 to 1994 on menopause transition, Im, Meleis, and Park (1999) found the major focus of concern was the comparison of Asian women's symptoms to those in Western countries. Almost all used a disease-oriented reference point. In all of these studies, the researchers attribute the change of attitudes and the increased awareness of menopausal symptoms to the dominant influence of Western medicine on the acceptance of the disease model of menopause transition.

Psychosocial model

The psychosocial perspective of midlife transition in women describes it as a process that is a naturally occurring part of normal development and should not be treated with medications, including hormonal therapies (Olazabal et al., 1999). This model assumes that negative experiences of a woman in menopausal transition are the result of two factors. These are that dominating social constructs (1) define women according to role specification, and (2) create the framework within which they respond to the natural process (Arpanantikul, 2004; Woods & Mitchell, 2005). In other words, how a woman reacts to menopausal transition depends upon how she has been socialized to think about

her roles in society during the transition and how she is supposed to react to this part of her life.

According to this model, the transition is a natural process that every woman must go through and experience in her own way. However, it is the social construct of which she is a part that allows or disallows expression of the experience. The current dominate construct implies a cutoff point (usually within an arbitrary age range) at which time women are expected to decline in health, are devalued because of their loss of youth and reproductive ability, and begin to question their overall purpose and usefulness (Woods & Mitchell, 2005). Some women therefore, from the psychosocial viewpoint, have been conditioned to think and react to the transition in terms of decline and deficiency rather than a time of expressing their own unique experiences. According to those who ascribe to a psychosocial viewpoint, treatments are not necessary and it is societal norms that have dictated otherwise.

Positive experiences however can and do occur as a result of living within a socio-cultural environment supportive of the natural process of midlife transition. The transition is not seen as a period of dread or decline; rather, its significance is placed within the context of whatever else is going on in their lives. Studies of women of lower socioeconomic status experiences of midlife have suggested a resistance to the dominant social construction, as well as the biomedical model, of menopausal transition (Burns, 2000; Woods & Mitchell, 2005). These women “viewed the transition as aging, not disease”; and “its meaning was a function of its significance in the broader context of their lives” (Woods & Mitchell, 2005). In other studies, it was suggested that the

menopausal transition had the potential for being a time of self-reflection and a potential time for psychological growth, even though it cannot be assumed to have that same potential for every woman (Leonard & Burns, 2006; Busch, Barth-Olafsson, Rosenhagen, & Collins, 2003; Choi, 1995).

Both positive and negative responses to menopausal transition are possible within the psychosocial model. However, this model when viewed in the extreme, could very well establish a social construct with a potential for self-devaluing as great as the dominant social structure already present. Encouraging women to avoid any medical intervention, which is what extremists of this model support, denies a woman the choice in how she experiences the transition and in seeking what she might perceive to be helpful. For those experiencing severe biological symptoms during the transition that choose to medicate or use other treatments “may lead to conflict and feeling of failure and loss of self-esteem” (Lindh-Astrand et al., 2007).

Holistic model

The holistic perspective of the menopausal transition views transition as a multidimensional process with experiences and expectations that will vary between women (Olazabal et al, 1999). It values each woman’s needs and takes into consideration the interrelationships of the changes occurring within the process. In addition, Olazabal et al. (1999) asserted this perspective could “stimulate self-control and lead to empowerment” (in Lindh-Astrand et al., 2007, p.510). The menopausal transition, when viewed as a developmental stage, is sometimes purported to support the holistic paradigm as it recognizes the contributions and interconnectedness of the biological, psychological,

social, and cultural factors occurring during this period of time (Arpanantikul, 2004; Busch et al., 2003; Choi, 1995). Busch, Barth-Olafson, Rosenhagen, and Collins (2003) used a mixed methods approach to examine the interrelationship among biological, social, and cultural factors and their affect on how women viewed their menopausal transition. The results demonstrated the transitional period as having potential for personal development for most women. In addition, if the transition was not already considered a positive period of time, there was the potential for it becoming so.

Arpanantikul (2004), using a phenomenological approach, studied the midlife experiences of Thai women from diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. She found that their experiences were a “product of the interrelationship of biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors” (Arpanantikul, 2004, p. 49). Choi (1995) suggested having a holistic perspective positioned within a developmental framework helps in assisting women to adapt to changes that are occurring. In addition, it provides a perspective from which women in this stage of life can develop “self-understanding, increased personal competence and resolution of personal conflict” (Choi, 1995, p. 60).

Using a phenomenological approach, Lindh-Astrand et al. (2007), explored how, if at all, conceptions of midlife transition varied among women who sought advice and treatment from health care providers. The results demonstrated that women were indeed individual in their conceptions of midlife transition. Based on the findings, the researchers perceived the description of midlife transition experienced by women was “a natural process affected by endocrine and lifestyle factors as well as by the psychosocial situation and by aging *per se*” (Lindh-Astrand et al., 2007, p.516). The researchers

described this as a holistic view; however, the sample included only those women seeking care for the physiological menopausal symptoms. The location of the study, the mindset of the women on physiological symptoms, and the structured format of the interview, may have influenced whether or not they felt they could express freely their experiences. While the researchers viewed it as holistic with respect given to experiences defined by the instrument, the fact remains the study still focused on physical symptoms which in turn placed it within the context of the biomedical model. The study is however a positive move toward attempting a more enlightened view of the experience of midlife.

Life course/span/cycle model

One of the most commonly used approaches to the study or explanation of events during midlife views it through the lens of the stages or phases of human development. The terms used to encapsulate all the theories have evolved from life cycle, to life span, to life course. Work done by psychologists refers to it as life span, the term that replaced life cycle, life span refers to the duration of life and theories out of this perspective would include the developmental theories such as those of Freud, Erickson, and Levinson. They are theories based on the assumptions of age specific characteristics which vary little across time (George, 1993). In addition, they assume a linear progression of development where at each stage there is a specific task or conflict that must be successfully mastered or resolved before moving on to the next stage. They also assume that this progression will be the same for every person across the life span.

Erikson's development of ego theory, assumes that life proceeds through phases each with its own developmental tasks, physical, emotional, and cognitive, requiring resolution

before moving to the next phase. While at first glance it appears the model is useful in midlife studies, the model and its first five stages grew out of the field of child development. The last three stages referring to adult development have been assumed, constructed, and patterned after the first five. While he never referred to the tensions within each stage as a crisis, others who have used his model have, implying that crisis is a normal part of development (Rossi, 1980). A review by Rossi (1980) revealed that the developmental theories of Daniel Levinson and George Valiant, each described as stages containing points of conflict with resolution occurring through self-evaluation, are merely variations on the same theme.

The life course perspective arises out of the sociologist's framework and is considered to be appropriate for studying transitions (Rossi, 1980). Rather than using age categories to demarcate stages of development across the life span, the life course perspectives "reflect the intersection of social and historical factors with personal biography....[whose] patterns are expected to vary across time space and populations" (George, 1993). When applied across populations, eventually the life stages, trajectories and transitions, timing and ordering of events would coalesce to produce a normative life course (Macmillan, 2005). Though there is some indication that research from a life course perspective is moving toward a more holistic approach when viewing transitions and development "typically incorporation of life course structures into empirical work is partial and fragmenting" (Macmillan, 2005). Regardless, all refer to various stages or phases within the development of the human being wherein major events take place and different expectations of role definition occur.

While it is easy to understand why these models could be used to provide structure for a research project on women in a particular phase or stage of life, there are several problems with this approach. The first major concern is that the theories of Levinson and Valiant emerged from studies conducted only on men between the ages of 30 and 50 years of age. Erikson's theory arose from child development theory. To assume that women's midlife fell into these same age ranges was arbitrary and socially structured (Rossi, 1980). Gutmann (cited in Rossi, 1980) argued that the "concepts measured in studies on ego strength in males use socially derived categories, relative to men, such as a capacity for delay, future orientation, ability to form ego boundaries and objectivity. Women held to the same measurements would be seen as maladaptive and regressive" (Guttmann cited in Rossi, 1980, p. 8). On the other hand, if the measurement categories were derived from a social structure that valued shared experiences and concern for others, ego strength may be defined as the individual's capacity to be empathetic. While women would excel in this situation, men would be viewed as regressive and maladaptive.

The second problem with using the traditional developmental theories to study women's experiences concerns how women view the world and its effect of study results. The primary assumption of the models is that developmental stages, as well as the conflicts to be resolved within them, are not only the same, but occur at the same time in life irrespective of gender. As women's thinking is nonlinear, relational and reflective (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Campbell and Bunting, 1991; Gilligan, 1982; Stein, 2006; Surrey, 1991) conflicts would not viewed in the same way as men, nor

would their resolution be approached with similar methods. Therefore, any research on the experiences of women in any developmental stage using linear models will provide only a glimpse of the experiences. Studies framed within this theoretical view discourage expression of how women experience events within the situated contexts of their lives.

Through synthesis of the findings from studies from all four models, the current state of knowledge can be explained. Midlife transition in women is a process whose occurrence is inevitable, yet unique for every woman. There is an interrelationship between biological, psychological, cultural, and social factors whose changes are also inevitable, but to which the responses of the women are not. While the studies that currently exist address these factors either individually or as part of the greater whole, when the data are analyzed, results are usually placed within already known structures or categories with a tendency toward medicalization of experiences.

Unitary Pattern

Viewing women's transition of midlife as a transformative process is facilitated by viewing the transition through a unitary lens that recognizes midlife in its wholeness rather than as fragmented. A unitary approach to research uses pattern as its phenomenon of focus. Pattern is the key postulate in Martha Rogers' science of unitary human beings (1992). This study is grounded in the conceptualization of midlife transition as a pattern of wholeness. Within this system humans and environments are energy fields that are integral with each other. Neither can be known without the other and the two are inextricably linked. Energy fields are abstract but what is seen by the human eye is a

manifestation of the fields known as pattern. Pattern itself is an abstraction and cannot be known directly. However, pattern manifests through experiences and events that occur within the mutual process of the human and environmental energy fields. The manifestation of pattern that distinguishes the human field is representative of that mutual process. In other words, pattern cannot be seen but life events and experiences are representations of the integrated pattern of existence of human life. The human and energy fields are in continual motion, moving toward higher complexity of being, and therefore undergoing constant change. When pattern is studied, one does not attempt to suspend time but rather engages in the active process of the change in order to direct or participate in it.

Out of Rogers' (1992) science of unitary human beings two major theorists, Newman and Cowling, have used pattern as the basis for their scholarly works. Both considered pattern to be the conduit for studying phenomena from a unitary view and that it is representative of the whole. It is through examining pattern that knowledge and meaning of the whole is gained. Newman (1997) defined pattern as "the sequential configurations evolving over time like waves of explicit-implicit phenomena, unfolding-enfolding" (p. 4). This definition honors the nonlinear evolutionary process of human existence that reflects the inclusion of relative past, present and relative future experiences that are in themselves reflections of pattern. To Newman (1989),

each person is a manifestation of the pattern of consciousness of all that there is...both the seen pattern of our bodies and the unseen pattern of our minds, feelings and spirits are manifestations of an underlying pattern (p.2).

Pattern is not a static phenomenon and therefore will not lend itself to deterministic research methods. In order to find meaning of the whole one must experience the pattern unfolding and therefore the researcher must be engaged with the participants. This is a shared process and the researcher's role is to help the "participants understand the meaning of their situations, with its potential for action" (p.7). As such, the researcher assists the participant to recognize pattern and to facilitate awareness and insight into the pattern.

Pattern is one of the key elements within Cowling's (2004a) unitary appreciative inquiry method. Defined as the "distinguishing feature of an energy field in unity", pattern is also seen as an "abstraction that changes continuously and gives identity to the field" (Cowling, 2004a, p. 204). Pattern is unitary, implying uniqueness to the individual, while at the same time may manifest in diverse and complex ways (Cowling, 2004a). It is imperative when appreciating pattern that one understands the uniqueness of each human energy field. While similarities of pattern may exist between and among them, the goal is not to seek absolutes or universals. In studying unitary pattern, researchers are "reaching for something that cannot be fully captured" (Cowling, 2004a, p.204). Life events or experiences are pattern manifestations connected to underlying pattern and provide glimpses of the inherent wholeness of human existence. When exploring life patterns, one has to be open to all the different ways the patterns are embedded within the larger fabric of human existence. Likewise, just as there are many diverse and complex way in which patterns may manifest during the exploration, there are numerous ways of representing

the pattern of wholeness such as metaphor, story, music, imagery, and reflecting on the knowledge generated by the entire process (Cowling, 2004a, p.205).

Rogers used both the terms pattern and patterning in her conceptual system of the science of unitary human beings. Alligood & Fawcett (2004) conducted a hermeneutic interpretive study of Rogers' major works in order to clarify the usage of each term. They concluded "the concept of patterning as an action word is different from the noun pattern" (Alligood & Fawcett, 2004, p12). Manifestations of pattern are action oriented. As manifestations of the person-environment mutual process emerge, what is observed as the process is patterning.

Patterning as used by Rogers, is the dynamic or active process of the life of the human being. Manifestations of patterning are visible or otherwise accessible to the senses (Alligood & Fawcett, 2004, p. 11).

In his work in unitary healing as appreciating wholeness, Cowling has transitioned to the term life patterning as the primary indicator or reference point for the patterning of the whole in individuals, groups and communities (Cowling & Repede, 2009). In this study, midlife transition is considered to be a complex, multidimensional evolutionary process. It is an active process in which change is constantly and simultaneously occurring. As manifestations of the pattern of the whole, (midlife transition) are continuously emerging, they are seen as nonstatic, observable phenomena. These events and experiences will be referred to throughout the study as patterning.

Life Patterning of Women in Midlife Transition

Midlife transition in women is a multidimensional process whose occurrence is inevitable, yet unique for every woman. There is an interrelationship between biological, psychological, cultural and social factors whose changes are also inevitable, but to which the response of the women are not. While the studies that currently exist address these factors either individually or as part of the greater whole, when these data are analyzed the results are usually placed within already known structures or categories with a tendency toward medicalization of experiences. Knowledge gained in this fashion contributes to a fragmented sense of self.

Implied within most all studies, Western and non-Western alike, is the assumption that transitions can be measured at a single point in one's life. These studies fail to grasp that transitions involve change and as such are dynamic. Transitional theory offers a new perspective on women in midlife. From extensive research inquiry into the concept of transition, Kralik, Visentin, and van Loon (2006) defined transition as "a process of convoluted passage during which people redefine their sense of self and redevelop self-agency in response to disruptive life events" (p. 321). The most important implication related to this study from this definition is that transition involves a process within which women respond to change and that the response is important. The life events that occur during the years of midlife result in disruption of their sense of identity that may be positive or negative. They may have similarly labeled biological or psychosocial symptoms; however, how they experience and respond to them will be unique to each woman. Her entire life history and the contexts within which she finds herself during

life's transitions influence the experience of midlife for a woman. (Meleis, Sawyer, Im, Messias & Schumacher, 2000). Following her study of middle-aged women adapting to change in their lives, Howell (2005) concluded that women experience and respond to changes in their lives differently depending on their life situations and that offering multiple modes of methods for expression of their experiences was key to successful adaptation. However, further research using these methods of expression was important to gathering more knowledge about the transition. While a qualitative study has the potential for gathering and discovering these experiences, it must be situated within a theoretical framework that views woman's existence as greater than the sum of its parts and whose being is constantly evolving and changing. It is also imperative that the framework values their knowledge and experiences as valid, relative, and important to the lives of women.

Women search out information about the changes that are occurring during midlife transition in order to find meaning in their lives. This finding is borne out from multiple studies inquiring into major sources of information sought by women in midlife transition. In their study of Canadian midlife women, Suter, Verhoef, Bockmuehl, Forest, Bobey, and Armitage (2007) found that multiple sources for information regarding menopause and its transition were sought and that books written by women, internet sites, and workshops were very popular. However, they were disappointed that their health care providers were unable to help them sort out the information in order to make health care decisions. Bertero's (2003) study on the perception of menopause in Swedish midlife women pointed to lack of knowledge about the changes occurring during this time and

that their attitudes about menopause were based on information received from mass media, female friends and kindred women. Clinkingbeard, Minton, Davis, and McDermott (1999) found that while women talk to their doctors, other women and relatives regarding midlife, they rely primarily on women's magazines for their information. Using focus groups and interviews with women in midlife Griffiths (1999) demonstrated the major source for information regarding midlife for women in the United Kingdom was the media and social contacts. Common to all these studies was that the information available centered around on the biological symptoms of menopause and its treatment including hormone replacement therapy.

An online search for books on the topic of midlife at two major vendor sites, Barnes & Noble.com and Amazon.com, resulted in 5500 items indicating an implied desire of women to find answers to their questions about self and purpose. Of those, 48 were related specifically to hormonal therapy, 326 to relief of anxiety and stress using exercise, and 34 related to menopause. Narrowing the search focus to specifically women in midlife transition resulted in only seven listings. All of these operated from a generalist point of view that essentialized the experience of midlife transition for all women. This observation is supported by a participant in Banister's (1999b) study on finding meaning in women's midlife experience who stated of her experience, "'pop' books about women and aging that are appearing on booksellers' shelves not only ignore the midlife experience of lesbians but, for these women, provoke more questions than they answer about midlife women and their concerns" (p.17). Adding support to these findings is the qualitative research done by Lyons and Griffin (2003) on self-help literature for women

at midlife. In their qualitative comparative analysis they found that the predominant discourse was from a biomedical view and focused on the management of symptoms. The implication from these findings supports the view that current lay literature limits the parameters within which women might find information about the experiences of their transition.

In their study on cultural influences on the meanings, perceptions and management of menopause, Hall, Callister, Berry and Matsumura (2007) included a metasynthesis of qualitative research literature on the topic from 1999 to 2005. Twenty-five studies were reviewed and all focused on how psychobiological symptoms were managed and how culture affected the way the women perceived this change in their lives. None offered the opportunity for the women to simply explicate the experience of the transition. When viewed through the unitary lens, menopause in these studies, as in the study by Lyons and Griffin (2003), could be seen as only one facet of the larger pattern of midlife transition.

Within the unitary/transformational paradigm midlife transition is understood as complex with multidimensionality. Changes that are occurring are constant, continually evolutionary and expressed as pattern through life events and experiences. Menopause is a category within which to contain one of those life events and represents only one facet of the larger whole of the transitional process. Women seek to make meaning of their lives within the whole process (pattern) of transition. Newman (1997) called this “experiencing the whole” where pattern is evolving and equates with the meaning of the whole. Meaning of pattern is found in relationships, in fact the “concept of pattern is based in relationships and it is in finding meaning of that pattern that connects us” (Newman,

2002). She further asserts that the “meaning [of pattern] permits a jump from what is seen and heard to the larger context and from the explicit to the implicit” (p. 6). Picard (2000) studied the meaning of health in seventeen midlife women using Newman’s theory of expanding consciousness. Pattern was expressed in intentional, creative movement and narrative. Each person’s pattern was unique but had several themes in common and seemed to converge during the course of the study. “Patterns of meanings were identified in relationships with others, self, and spirit as well as challenges of loss, illness, and threats to relationships” (Picard, 2000, p.150). Musker’s (2008) study with ten women in midlife transition using Newman’s theory demonstrated unitary pattern that emerged through three themes of “coming to terms with losses and unexpected gains, increasing awareness of time passing, and concentrating on health and vitality.”(p. 333). The greatest result however was that during the process, the women became more aware of the underlying unitary pattern and were able to see the potential for action toward health. Through pattern recognition the women grew in knowledge of self and their abilities to direct the courses of their lives.

In summary, for women who live long enough, the transition of midlife is inevitable. Current knowledge of the transition offers a fragmented perspective of the transition that is problem based. The information available to women, while helpful for navigating particular events that present during this time, is still insufficient for providing information available to women from the perspective of experiences and their meanings to individual woman. Literature currently available to women fails to address the transition as a process of continuous change with great potential for transformation. This

study has built on what is known from the bio-psycho-social perspective. Exploring the life patterning of women experiencing midlife transition through a unitary lens provided the opportunity to move beyond symptomology where new knowledge from the perspective of the wholeness of the woman would emerge.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the life patterning of women in the process of midlife transition. This study employed a research methodology aimed at appreciating the wholeness of human life. The study involved the development and implementation of a participative unitary appreciative inquiry group for women who wished to explore midlife transition. The outcome of the study was a narrative profile that expressed the life patterning of women in midlife transition, both individually and collectively that emerged from the process. The research questions for this study were: (1) What is the individual life patterning of women in midlife transition that emerges out of a participative unitary appreciative inquiry group process for women exploring their experiences of midlife; and (2) What is the collective life patterning of women in midlife transition that emerges out of a participative unitary appreciative group process for women exploring their midlife experiences?

Conceptual Framework

The principles of feminist research provided the epistemological underpinnings for this study. These are that: (1) women can be knowers and their experiences are legitimate sources of knowledge, (2) subjective data are valued, (3) informants are

“experts” on their own lives, (4) knowledge is relational and contextual, and (5) boundaries between personal and public, or personal and political spheres are artificial as are sharp distinctions between theory and practice (Campbell & Bunting, 1991, p.16). Feminist research places the woman’s experiences as the object of study, not the woman herself. In addition, the goal of inquiry situated within the feminist paradigm is to see the world from the viewpoint of a particular group of women. Harding (1986) asserted that feminist research is relational and attempts to discover relationships between the scientific world and the subjective world of feeling, experiences, values, and collective consciousness. In addition, it is emancipatory in that through the research process women are encouraged to see new possibilities in their lives. Research based on feminist principles also gives voice to women and their experiences by giving credibility to their stories. As this study explored life patterning of women in midlife transition that emerged through an individual and group process using methods that are inherently relational and participatory, it was grounded within this epistemology.

The science of unitary human beings (Rogers, 1992) provided the conceptual framework and guided the choice of design and methods. Within this framework individuals were defined as unitary human beings; human energy fields identified by field pattern wherein pattern is an expression of the mutual process between the human and environmental energy fields. The concept of pattern has been further specified according to Alligood and Fawcett (2004) as having an action orientation and that it is observable making the use of the term patterning more appropriate. The experiences described by women during the midlife transition were field pattern manifestations of change. These

manifestations reflected the patterning of the whole, or energy field, in unitary language. Cowling has used the concept of life patterning as the primary reference point or indicator for this patterning. In this study, life patterning was seen as expressing itself through phenomena associated with midlife transition.

The three principles of homeodynamics of Roger's (1990) framework provided the lens through which change was viewed and in particular to this area of interest, midlife transition. They are:

1. Principle of Resonancy: [change as] continuous from lower to higher frequency wave patterns in human and environmental fields;
2. Principle of Helicy: [change as] continuous, innovative, unpredictable, and increasing diversity of human and environmental field patterns;
3. Principle of Integrality: [change as] continuous mutual human field and environmental field process (Malinski & Barrett, 1994).

Synthesis of these principles provided the conceptual definition of transition as the experience of change within the mutual process of the human-environmental energy field that is continuous, innovative, unpredictable, and evolutionary. Therefore, for this study, midlife transition for women was defined as a process of continual, multidimensional, and evolutionary change experienced through the context of their life situations and expressed through recognizable life patterning. This idea is consistent with the concept of field patterning within Rogers' framework.

The choice of methodology for this qualitative study of life patterning of women in midlife transition was consistent with both the epistemological underpinnings of feminist

research as well as framed within Rogers' science of unitary human beings (SUHB). Researchers have agreed that no single feminist methodology exists and that it is truly the research question and how it is framed within the feminine perspective that drives the choice of methodology to use (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Harding, 1986; Seibold, Richards, & Simon, 1994; Silverman, 2004, Speciale & Carpenter, 2003; Thorne & Varcoe, 1998). In addition, Rogers' science of unitary human beings does not prescribe a particular methodological inquiry, however scholars within this school of thought have recommended that the inquiry must be consistent with a unitary perspective (Barrett, Cowling, Carboni, & Butcher, 1997). In other words, the inquiry must not succumb to a reductionist approach in either collecting or analyzing information. Because the aim of this study was to explicate the life patterning of women in the process of midlife transition using approaches that would uncover and appreciate wholeness of this patterning, methods that could revert to reductionist viewpoints were avoided. The design and methods chosen were considered to be those most congruent with the unitary perspective reflecting feminist values and having the potential to most fully answer the research questions.

Participative Unitary Appreciative Inquiry

For this study Cowling's (2001) participative unitary appreciative inquiry (PAUI) was used. This method of inquiry has both structure and process and arose out of Rogers' science of unitary human beings. This method of inquiry "seeks to know the wholeness, uniqueness, and essence of human life and provides a way of identifying patterning that

reflects it” (Cowling, 2001, p. 33). The orientation, process and sets of approaches of PUIAI “serve to actualize ontologic and epistemologic assumptions of a unitary-transformative paradigm” (Cowling, 2001, p. 33). This approach is consistent with the principles of feminist research described earlier in this chapter and parallels can be drawn between the elements of the PUIAI process and feminist research principles. These elements include appreciative knowing that is participatory, synoptic, and transformative.

Appreciative knowing has as its foundation that “human life is a miracle that can never be comprehended fully” (Cowling, 2001, p. 34). This type of knowing does not seek absolutes, rather it embraces that which can never be fully known or described with language or diagnosis. Inherent in appreciative knowing is that it is different from critical knowing and requires active participation of both the inquirer and the participant as inquirers/participants. The aim of this way of knowing is that through the process of inquiry the pattern of information that emerges reflects wholeness, uniqueness, and essence of the group. In this type of inquiry or knowing a group may be numbers of individual dyads or focus groups. This type of knowing is consistent within the framework of feminist research in that both are concerned with understanding human life conditions and situations that are transformative and affirming. As a woman in this study was being considered in her wholeness and uniqueness using this method, the risk of essentializing the experience was also avoided.

The process for participatory unitary appreciative inquiry arose from the concept of “participatory consciousness” in that the participant in the research is also the inquirer. Both the researcher and the participant work together to

mutually understand the appreciative process and share in the egalitarian ideal inherent in the relationship, the openness to emergent discovery in the work, the potential for negotiation, and that potential outcomes are not predicted or prescribed (Cowling, 2001, p.34).

This use of participatory consciousness reflects an egalitarian point of view that is also consistent with feminist values.

Within the unitary framework, consciousness is viewed as extending beyond the false boundaries of mere cognition. Unitary consciousness is conceived as “informational patterning” that encompasses logic and analysis, body and mind, and spirit and form in a unified whole (Cowling & Repede, 2009). Consciousness “incorporates the total information of the field” (Newman, 1979 cited in Cowling and Repede, 2009). So in relationship to this research, the participatory consciousness was the patterning of information that emerged from the group process. Within the group process, all information was considered; each participant was viewed as the expert knower of her experiences which was consistent with feminist principles. In addition to her experiences, perceptions of the experiences and the way she expressed them were all considered informational patterning of the whole. Sharing of these forms of knowledge by each participant in the proposed study using the participative group process contributed to the collective consciousness, or informational patterning, of midlife transition in women.

In participatory unitary appreciative inquiry (Cowling, 2001), data are gathered and then considered within a synoptic rather than analytic framework. The synoptic framework is in line with the feminist perspective that knowledge is contextual and

relational. The process of gathering data and considering it within the contextual and relational reality of women's lives allowed the researcher to see the wholeness and uniqueness of life patterning that was sought to address the purpose of the study. With this process, experiences were viewed within the context of and in relationship to the environment as well as the physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual realms of the individual.

Finally, participatory unitary appreciative inquiry is potentially transformative and as such shares with feminist epistemology the potential for emancipation of women in midlife to give voice to their experiences. Cowling (2001) identified three ways in which participatory unitary appreciative inquiry has transformative potential. Appreciative inquiry (1) seeks to understand a condition of existence, (2) employs the use of unitive consciousness, and (3) promotes the development of one's self as an instrument of appreciation. Through the inquiry process, the participant-inquirer has the potential for changing how she views her life. The experiences of her relative past, relative present and relative future converge as her awareness of self increases. Through this potentially transforming process the woman may be able to see the possibilities for directing the course of her life. This in itself could be emancipating and self-fulfilling. While emancipation was not the primary aim of this study, it was seen as a possible benefit of participating.

It was the aim of this study to explore the experiences of women in midlife transition and to uncover life patterning reflective of wholeness unique to each woman. The participatory unitary appreciative inquiry method has structure that provided general

guidelines for approaching the inquiry. It was understood that each element needed to be adjusted in order to individualize the study. The steps or elements of the method as described by Cowling (2001, p. 38) are as follows:

(1) The scientist/practitioner seeks out a life situation, phenomenon, or concern from a unitary perspective. (2) The scientist/practitioner describes the inquiry endeavor including its focus on unitary field pattern explaining its goal toward appreciating wholeness, uniqueness and essence fit the particular situation, phenomenon, or concern. (3) Approval of the research project through typical human subjects review, and informed consent for participants is provided. (4) A partnership is suggested that embraces all involved as co-equal participants. (5) The term inquirer/participant is used for both the scientist/practitioner and all other participants. (6) Specific intent of inquirer/participants is made explicit with one another, and a form and structure for the endeavor are agreed upon. (7) The form of documentation of experiences, perceptions, and expressions is based on what best reflects pattern information meaningful to the participants. Various forms may include journaling, audiotaping and/or videotaping. Journaling might include field notes, methodological notes, peer review notes and reflective notes. (8) The participatory unitary appreciative inquiry lasts for a period of time agreed upon by the participants usually several months to a year. (9) Synopsis is used to create pattern profile and is constructed by the participants and scientist/practitioner together. The primary voice in the profile construction is that of the participant and not the scientist.

These guidelines provided the underpinnings of the study design and methods for data gathering, synthesis, and reporting described a little later in chapter.

Mandala construction

For this study the participants engaged in creating mandalas. Mandalas are circular art forms and considered to be the universal symbol of unitary consciousness. Mandala forms can be traced as far back as prehistoric times when they were used by humans to give meaning to the world around them (Huyser, 2002). They later began to be used in sacred rituals and have also taken on symbolic meaning in various religions and cults.

According to Jung (1964), there is creative purpose to mandala making as it “gives expression and form to something that does not yet exist, something new and unique” (Jung, 1964, p.225). As Jung began his personal period of self-discovery, mandala forms came to him during times of meditation and during the dreaming state (Stein, 2006). Jung (1973) described the mandala as an archetypal symbol representing wholeness. His work has provided the foundation for further exploration of this art form as a conduit for self-discover and psychotherapy. Joan Kellogg (2002), a student of Jung, studied thousands of mandalas and began to see repeating patterns of archetypal symbols and patterns and their relationship to events occurring in patients lives. Through analysis of all these themes, she created the Archetypal Stages Great Round of Mandala Forms which reflects the prototypical mandala forms reflecting psychological development (Fincher, 1991). This breakthrough paved the way for non-professional and personal use of mandalas for personal growth.

The uses of mandalas in healing practices, for making sense of the universe, and in self-discovery date back to ancient history. However, they are currently used in meditative practices, (Fincher, 2006), psychotherapy, (Cox & Cohen, 2000; Henderson, Rosen, & Mascaro, 2007; Ireland & Brekke, 1980; Lev-Wiesel & Liraz, 2007), and in self-discovery (Fincher, 2006). Drawing mandalas “can provide structure and comfort and can facilitate the process of organizing and integrating fragmented aspects of the psyche into a more complete gestalt” (Cox & Cohen, 2000, p.195). When combined with the activity of drawing a mandala, writing a narrative about an experience results in more detailed and descriptive accounting of the experiences (Lev-Weisel & Liraz, 2007).

Mandala construction provides “cognitive integration and organization to emotional experiences that will give a sense of personal meaning to the experiences” (Henderson, Rosen, & Mascaro, 2007, p.149). By focusing on a topic, concern, or issue while creating a mandala, insights that otherwise might not be revealed emerge. According to Ireland and Brekke (1980), the “person making a mandala is mapping a territory wherein polarities are reconciled and transformed into an integrative whole” (p. 218).

In this study, women were asked to consider their life patterning in its wholeness rather than categorically. The mandala construction offered a way for them to extend beyond socially constructed ideas of midlife transition and express their experiences of midlife framed within its inherent wholeness. In addition, their interpretation of the mandala through their narrative expression of midlife transition was enhanced. In summary, the mandala provided a primary source of information or data about the life patterning of the women who participated in the study. The mandala provided complementary information, that when considered in the context of other data collected provided a fuller picture of life patterning. It is assumed in this perspective that the mandala is an expression of consciousness that reflects the patterning of the individual’s life and in this study, the group consciousness of the participants reflecting the patterning of the group.

Researcher preparation

It was not the intent to focus on the mandalas themselves as the only source of data for this study; rather the mandala served as an aesthetic vehicle for bringing into conscious awareness the experiences and perception of midlife transition. In addition, the

mandala served as a symbolic space and time container within which the self-in-relation to the universe could be explored. The important factor in working with mandalas is that, while archetypes exist that may emerge within drawn mandalas, it is the meaning placed on the images and colors by the participant that is considered paramount. This is also consistent with the positioning of the participant's view in participative unitary appreciative inquiry. In participative unitary appreciative method, the participant and researcher are considered co-researchers and the researcher provides insights that emerge through the process.

In order to share information related to mandala interpretation, the researcher underwent a process of preparation. For a number of years the principle researcher has been engaged in self exploration using mandala construction and self – reflection. Enhancement of knowledge related to classic interpretation of symbols and colors has been accomplished through research on mandala methods and interpretation. In addition, the researcher attended an intensive master course on creating and interpreting mandalas using Kellogg's (2002) Great Round of Mandala Forms system. Through synthesis of information from several interpretive sources (Fincher, 1991; Huyser, 2002; Kellogg, 2002), guidelines for color interpretation were generated (See Appendix G). This chart was used by the researcher as part of her interpretation of the participant's mandalas and was provided to suggest additional and information to the participant. At the end of the study, the participants were given a list of references to help them should they choose to continue to engage in their self-exploration.

Study Design

Population/sampling

The population for this study was women over 18 years of age (age of consent) who considered themselves to be in midlife transition. Even though the literature places the age range for midlife in women at 35 to 65 years of age, placing this parameter on the population and hence the sample, belied the unitary assumption that change is evolutionary, nonlinear and is unconstrained by the idea of the chronological time. Recruitment for the sample took place in a small metropolitan area in the southeastern United States. It was chosen due to its close proximity to the researcher's academic support and resources which was believed to be a way for reducing the cost of conducting the research. In addition, this city is large and provided the best opportunity for recruiting a diverse sample. Recruitment fliers stating the purpose of the research, eligibility requirements, and contact information were posted in non-medical and non-clinical sites in areas of the city thought to have the greatest potential for appealing to women of diverse backgrounds. These areas included social organizations, colleges and universities, laundromats, libraries, the unemployment office, hair salons and business offices. In addition to recruitment fliers, snowballing through potential participant referrals was used to ensure an adequate size sample. The study was open to all women who self-identified as being in midlife transition without regard to socio-economic status or ethno-cultural background. Besides identifying as being in midlife transition, the participants had to be able to speak English as this was the primary language of the researcher. In addition, they had to have transportation to the study location.

The purposive sample consisted of 10 (ten) women between 50 and 66 years of age who considered themselves to be in midlife transition. According to Heron and Reason (2005), for participatory research a sample size of six to twelve is considered adequate for this type study. A sample of less than six participants is considered too small because it lacks the variety of experience needed for an inquiry group. Credibility would suffer due to limited generation of information. A group of over twelve members becomes too unwieldy for the process and would tend to dilute the richness of the responsiveness needed for an in-depth inquiry. In addition, Munhall (2007) asserted that sample size is determined by how narrowly the domain of study is defined and the amount of data to be generated. The proposed study is narrow in focus, i. e. women who self-identify being in midlife transition. According to Munhall (2007), for a study with this focus domain, a sample size of 10 – 15 participants is sufficient. Cowling's (2004b) original study with women in despair using unitary appreciative inquiry had a sample target of 12, though a sample of 14 participants was used. In his study of the experiences or risk induced professional caregiver despair in registered nurses, Cox (2004) had a sample size of eight. Given the amount of data projected to be generated in the study, a target sample of 10 to 12 participants was desired. However, to allow for potential for attrition due to the multiple data collection events, 16 participants were recruited.

Potential participants contacted the researcher by telephone or email for an initial interview. A telephone interview with the researcher was conducted with every potential participant. During the telephone interview, the potential participant was given an overview of the study and what would be expected of them during the study, i. e., time

involved, and creation of mandalas, journaling and participation in a group process. At the conclusion of the telephone interview, the potential participant was given the time and location for the initial, individual meeting with the researcher. During the initial interview the participant was given a detailed description of the study and all consents were signed. In addition, participants who consented to the study were asked to choose a pseudonym by which they would be known throughout the study.

The setting for the study was St. Mary's Episcopal Church, a mission church very nearby the campus of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). This site was chosen because of its size and relaxed atmosphere. It was not so big as to swallow up the group of 10 women, but was large enough to comfortably allow space between them if needed during the action/reflection exercises. In addition, the space needed to be large enough to accommodate the women as they worked on construction of the group mandala. The building was relatively small and contained only one main room as its sanctuary, a kitchen area, a small bathroom, and the chaplains' office. Sparsely furnished with simple chairs and altar, there was very little adornment. Its décor could be classified as being strongly masculine. To enhance the space after the initial meeting, a complete cleaning overhaul was performed. On the day of the first group meeting, an inviting space was created by adding fresh flowers, aromatherapy, and gentle, meditative music. One of the participants even commented on how much better the space was to be in during the second session compared to the first. The process was repeated for the third session.

Data collection

In keeping with the process of PAUI, there were always opportunities for open dialogue so that topics related to each woman's experience could be explored. The participant and the researcher were each considered inquirer/participants and on equal ground and the dialogue between and among the members of the inquiry group drove additional prompts or questions. No time constraint within reason was applied and the initial interview for most of the women lasted 90 minutes. The second and third data gathering sessions each lasted six hours. At each session researcher field notes on the process as well as reflective journaling were kept that provided richness and context to the process and provided documentation for an audit trail. A file was kept on each participant, coded by a pseudonym of their choice and matched with the respective coded journal, within which all materials associated with their participation resided. All participant journals, notes, and field notes were transcribed as soon as possible after each data gathering session. Mandalas were kept with the transcriptions. In addition, field notes were kept with the transcriptions. A reflective journal kept by the researcher also served as a source of data. Any documents generated through the synthesis and synoptic processes were kept together with the original transcripts and field notes. These documents now reside in a locked filing drawer and are retrievable for audit and review. Original works of art and journals were returned to the participant at the completion of the dissertation.

Participants were chosen through a contact interview in response to the advertisement to determine eligibility for the study. After a pre-study telephone interview with the

researcher, each potential study participant met with the researcher for further details related to the study and to sign consents. Those who were eligible and desired to continue with the study began Phase One and participated in an action/reflection exercise whose process was repeated in Phase Two. While music for relaxation and meditation played softly in the background, the participant was assisted into a relaxed state using a meditation induction (See Appendix D) adapted from Dossey and Keegan (2009). The participant was observed for signs of relaxation that included slowed respirations of increased depth and body position that changed from upright and tense to softening of muscles and shifting of the body into a position of comfort. Once relaxed the participant was asked to focus on the question, “What is midlife to me?” She was allowed to remain in the meditative state as long as she felt the need, but was instructed when she was ready to “Create an image that reflects what midlife is to me” on paper which contained lightly pre-drawn circle. Once finished with the creation of the mandala, she was asked to journal her interpretation of the mandala as she reflected on the question, “How does this mandala tell the story of midlife for you.” In most instances the participant shared her reaction to the process and those comments became part of the researcher’s field notes. The researcher’s field notes also related observations of the process and reflective journaling. The researcher’s interpretation of the mandala, field notes and the participant’s interpretation and reflections provided the initial data for synopsis. The initial synthesis of data was sent to the participant for validation or correction and provided the starting point of discussion for the next phase.

The second contact was the first participatory group meeting and marked the beginning of Phase Two of the study. At this meeting, each woman shared the synthesis of information that emerged from the action/reflection exercise from Phase One. As the women shared, they engaged in discussion of insights and validation of one another's experiences. At the conclusion of the discussion, the women participated in two additional action/reflection exercises following the same process as before. No changes were made to the process, however, the setting had been made more conducive to relaxation with the addition of aromatherapy candles and fresh flowers throughout the room. One woman even voiced her appreciation of the improvement and "feminization" of the space. The open-ended questions for focus for these two exercises were (1) "How did you know you were in the transition of midlife?" and (2) "What is it like for you to be in midlife transition?" respectively. The participants used the process of mandala construction along with interpretive and reflective journaling to answer each one. Each session was followed by discussion that arose from the process of their action/reflection activity. The activity/reflection exercises were separated during the middle of the day by a break for lunch. Observations of the interactions among the participants as well as points of discussion were kept throughout the day-long process by the researcher and a research assistant, who was experienced in the inquiry method (PAUI). At the conclusion of the first group session (or second day of data collection) all participant journals and mandalas, researcher field notes, and researcher's reflective journal were transcribed. The process of synthesis exactly like the one in Phase One was followed with each of the activity/reflection exercises. This synthesis of information was given to the participant for

validation and feedback. At the beginning of the final meeting each participant engaged in synopsis of the information from all three exercises to create a narrative profile that reflected her individual life patterning profile (ILLP). This synopsis became the starting point for discussion for Phase Three.

At the final meeting, or second group session, each woman shared her individual life patterning profile (ILLP) of midlife transition with the group. As the profiles were shared, the group participated in theme extraction related to midlife transition. The participants were given a sheet of paper and asked to label it with two columns, Resonates and “Ahas!” As each woman shared her profile, the participants were asked to record anything from the profile that resonated with her own profile (Resonates), or that was a new thought but to which she could relate (Ahas!) After every woman had shared, the participants shared what they had written on their papers. The women engaged in categorizing themes (see Chapter IV-Findings). Focusing on the major themes identified by the participants, and in order to reflect the life patterning of the collective, a final aesthetic representation (group mandala) was created in response to the prompt, “Create an image that reflects what midlife is to you”, with you in this case indicating the group. Engaging all the senses, the mandala was created using fabrics and other embellishments brought to the session by the researcher and participants. Following the mandala construction the women individually offered an interpretation of the mandala by focusing the prompt, “How does this mandala tell the story of midlife for this group of women.” In addition, participants were encouraged to add general reflections of their experience with the process or other information related to any aspect of the research in their

journals. Finally, the researcher used field notes taken during the group process, her interpretation of the mandala, and the transcript of the group interpretations and narratives to create a narrative synoptic profile reflecting the group life patterning profile (GLPP) of women in midlife transition. This was sent to participants along with a picture of the group mandala for validation. Within several weeks after the final session contact was made with the participants by email for follow-up of their experiences during which many shared the impact of the study on their lives.

Data synopsis

For this study, the inquirer/participant and researcher were engaged in data synthesis and synopsis integral to data gathering. Data generation came from nine sources:

1. Demographic data pertinent to the study to confirm eligibility for the study and for purposes of sample description
2. Mandalas with personal interpretation
3. Transcripts of narratives and journalled reflections relative to each prompt
4. Group mandala with group interpretation based on theme extraction
5. Group narrative related to last prompt resulting from group process of theme extraction from individual profiles
6. Principal researcher's field notes that included observations of participants as they created mandalas individually and collectively, notes related to discussions of profiles within the group, reflections related to the process, contextual information of the environmental field within which research is conducted

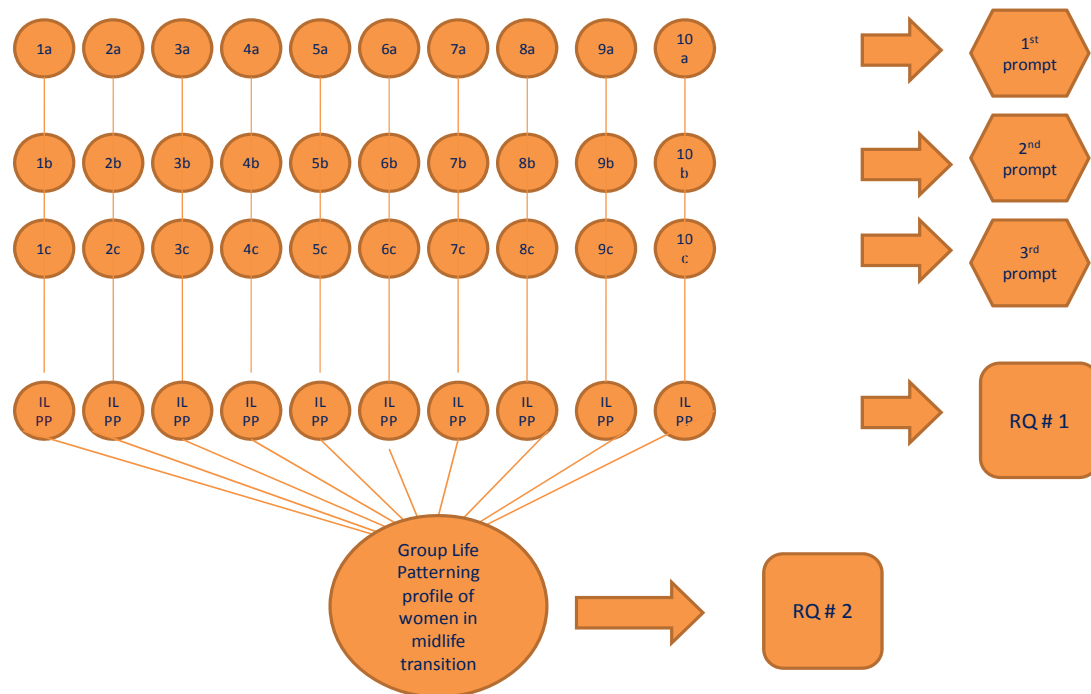
7. Individual synoptic narrative profile generated from participant journals, researcher interpretation of mandala, and researcher's field notes related to each prompt.
8. Final individual synoptic narrative created from the first three profiles that depicted the individual's life patterning of midlife transition.
9. Group synoptic narrative profile based on the themes extracted by the group, their group mandala construction and interpretation, field notes related to this process.

The approach to synopsis of data was identical for each participant and with each activity/reflection exercise. After each activity/reflection activity, copies were made of the constructed mandalas and journal reflections. Transcripts were transcribed and read through for general information and comparison to the hand written journals for accuracy. However, the transcription, done by the researcher, did not take place prior to initial interpretation of the mandala by the researcher. Before viewing any interpretation or reflections entered by the participant, and while maintaining a focus on the question reflected by the mandala, the researcher constructed a written interpretation of the mandala. The researcher's interpretation was then viewed together with the participant's reflections and interpretations, along with any comments kept in the researcher's field notes. A written synopsis of these forms of data were provided to the participant for validation within two weeks of the activity.

The following model is a graphic representation of the PAUI process followed for data collection and synopsis which resulted in formation of the Individual Life Patterning Profile (ILLP) and the Group Life Patterning Profile (GLPP). Read horizontally, each

circle represents the summary of the data gathered and synthesized from all information sources for each individual during each action/reflection phase (Phases One and Two). Read vertically, each circle combines to provide the unit of collective information that was the basis for synopsis into the individual life patterning profile (ILLP) and provided the answer to the first research question. Each ILLP was then viewed synoptically by all participants to create the Group Life Patterning Profile (GLLP) of women in midlife transition, thus answering the second research question.

Figure 1. Participative Unitary Appreciative Inquiry Process for Life Patterning of Women in Midlife Transition



Reporting of findings from a unitary appreciative inquiry study are “constructed to represent the pattern on wholeness integrating facets of unitary knowledge as

experiential, presentational, propositional and practical rather than segregating them” (Cowling, 2006, p. 124). As inquirer/participants engaged in the process and focus of inquiry into midlife transition, they set the stage for generation of experiential knowledge. Presentational knowledge arose through aesthetic or expressive representation of realities. For this study, women created and interpreted mandalas to express their realities of midlife transition. Participating in discussions within the group process allowed for propositional knowledge to emerge and be described. New awareness and understanding of the focus of inquiry as well as the inquiry process was generated. Finally, practical knowledge arose through a culmination of the other forms of knowledge. This type of knowledge has the potential for transformatory and emancipatory actions that can lead to improved quality of life. While emancipation was not the primary aim of this study, knowledge emerged that provided information for the women so they were able to developing strategies useful to them as they moved through midlife transition.

Human subject protection

In order to ensure the safety and to protect the rights of participants to privacy and confidentiality, guidelines required by University of North Carolina at Greensboro Institutional Review Board were followed. The participant was informed that all information gathered from them would be kept confidential with no identifiers. The subject was told she could withdraw at anytime and that participation was entirely voluntary. The purpose of the study was reiterated and the process of study was outlined. All data were and are still kept on a password protected computer and written materials

now reside in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home office. Results from the study have been reported in the aggregate without direct connection to the individual. Anonymity was not guaranteed as this was a group process; however, pseudonyms were chosen by each participant to enhance confidentiality. The participants signed confidentiality forms and consent forms. These forms addressed sharing of information outside the research setting, consent to participate in the study, consent for dissemination of findings and displaying of artistic creations. These are being kept on file, but not in connection with the stored transcripts or other documents generated during the research process.

Credibility and legitimacy

Cowling (2001) addressed the issues of credibility and legitimacy when using the relatively new method of participatory unitary appreciative inquiry. He recommended using member checking, auditing, and peer review; all recognized as general tenets of qualitative research credibility. Inherent in the process of data generation and synopsis using the participatory unitary appreciative inquiry method is member checking. This is accomplished through its participatory approach and the concept of inquirer/participant. For this study, the process of member checking for credibility and validation occurred from the very beginning of the research process and was an integral part of the research process. Study participants were co-researchers during the process. Coding of themes during the synthesis/synopsis phase using participant's own words, validation of synopsis and profile by the individuals and group kept researcher bias at a minimum. This process added credibility and reliability to the study. Auditing of the data by the co-researchers

occurred as they were mutually involved in the process in all phases of the data gathering and had equal voice in the construction of the pattern profile. Auditing of documentation was done by the dissertation chair and a research assistant as both were well-versed in the conceptual system and method, as well as qualitative research. In addition to audit procedures, they provided peer review to ensure “logical consistency in the process” and to “enhance the reflective aspects of the process” (Cowling, 2001, p. 45).

Trustworthiness or quality of the data in participatory unitary appreciative inquiry is related to the “diversity of the data sources, the theoretic schemes used by the researcher, and the designs used to uncover patterns of commonality and uniqueness” (Cowling, 2001, p.45). By using synopsis and synthesis and including all data sources to discover patterning both in individual cases as well across cases, this standard was met.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This study provided the opportunity for women in midlife to explore their experiences of the transition and to uncover life patterning reflective of wholeness unique to each woman. The purpose of the study was to explore the life patterning of these women in the process of midlife transition employing a research methodology aimed at appreciating wholeness of human life. Participative Unitary Appreciate Inquiry (PAUI) was the process/method used that enabled the researcher and women to explore the nature of their experiences beyond a medical and normative context. The research questions for this study were:

1. What is the individual life patterning of women in midlife transition that emerges out of a participative unitary appreciative inquiry group process for women exploring their experiences of midlife?
2. What is the collective life patterning of women in midlife transition that emerges out of a participative unitary appreciative inquiry group process for women exploring their experiences of midlife?

Sample

There were ten women from the piedmont area of North Carolina who began this study and all participants completed it. Their ages ranged from 50 years to 66 years

(M=54 years), and while chronological age was not a criterion for inclusion in the study, this age range reflects what is found in the literature to represent the middle to upper range of midlife. Eight of the ten women (80%) had completed some college and two of these had a four-year degree or better. Two of the ten (20%) had a high school diploma or equivalency. One of these had additional technical training. Eight of the ten (80%) were employed in clerical (30%) or professional (50%) jobs. The remaining two (20%) were unemployed. Two (20%) of the ten were African–American and the remaining eight (80%) were Euro-American. Seven (70%) claimed this study was their first experience of focused self-exploration. The other three (30%) had participated in self-discovery either formally (in classes) or by reading self-help literature.

Data Findings

Multiple forms of data were generated from the study. For each participant these included three mandalas, the participant's reflections on each mandala, researcher's interpretation of each mandala, the participant's verbal and written responses to researcher's interpretation and researcher's field notes. Answering the research questions required that all these forms of data be viewed synoptically and interpreted through a unitary lens in order to appreciate the life patterning that emerged. Patterning appreciation occurs through simultaneous recognition of three inextricable sources of information available during the process of pattern manifestation. These elements of informational patterning are perception, experience, and expression. Perception involves making sense of the experience of patterning. It involves reflecting on the experience

while actively engaging within the experience and is conscious knowledge of the experience of the patterning. Experience of the patterning is the living of and being in the experience of patterning as it unfolds. It engages all the senses and is what Cowling (1997) referred to as the “raw encounter of living with sensation” (p. 133). Expression of the patterning is not the pattern itself. Rather, it is how the experiences and perceptions of the patterning become manifest. As such, all data produced through encounters between the researcher and participants as well as that data which emerged through encounters within and among the participants in the group sessions were considered patterning information.

Each mandala was constructed based on a question that specifically related to one of the three elements of informational patterning. Ultimately, all the data forms were viewed synoptically and the essence, uniqueness, and wholeness of the individual patterning of midlife transition emerged. Each mandala/reflection activity focused on one of the elements as follows:

1. Perception: How does this mandala reflect what midlife transition is for you?
2. Experience: How did you know you were in midlife transition?
3. Expression: What is it like to be a woman in midlife transition?

The participant’s reflections on each creation along with the impressions of the researcher were viewed together to create an individual patterning profile. Viewing all the synoptic data, the final individual patterning profile was constructed primarily by the participant through simultaneous viewing of the mandalas and the prior synopses.

The second research question was addressed through synopsis of common themes extracted by the participants from sharing of their individual profiles. The final group patterning profile was a narrative constructed by the researcher. The profile was the result of synopsis that considered all information from three sources. (1) Synthesis of themes extracted from each individual's interpretation of the group mandala, (2) Researcher's notes related to observations and dialogue that took place during the group process and construction of the group mandala, and (3) Feedback from participants' feedback on the final group mandala.

The findings will be presented in order as follows:

- A contextual general description of the participant synthesized by the researcher from information shared by the participant on the demographic data sheet, her journal writings and observations by the researcher on the participant's responses to the activity and approach to the mandala creation.
- Each mandala, reflecting one of the elements of informational patterning (perceptions, experiences, and expressions) is followed by two narrative passages. The first passage, immediately following the mandala figure, is a synthesis of information extracted from the participant's journal related to how the mandala reflected the response to the question being asked. The second passage, under the heading Researcher's Perspective, is the researcher's view through a lens that integrates basic mandala interpretation information from Kellogg (2002), Fincher (1991), and Cox & Muller (2009). (See Appendix G) Quotes that appear in these

passages are from the participant. They are used to support observations and interpretations of the researcher.

- **Appreciation of the Whole: Individual Life Patterning Profile of Midlife Transition** is a narrative written by the participant synthesized from the three mandala activities. Therefore, it is indented to indicate that the passage is directly quoted from the participant's journal.
- **Group Patterning Profile of Women in Midlife Transition:** Begins with a description of the common themes that emerged during the final group process. These themes are presented in chart format. This is followed by a picture of the fabric mandala constructed by the women based on those common themes. The group patterning profile of women in midlife transition is a result of the synthesis of information from all of the participants' journalled interpretations of the constructed fabric mandala in response to how the mandala represented midlife transition for the group. The final profile presented here incorporates feedback on the synthesis received from the women.

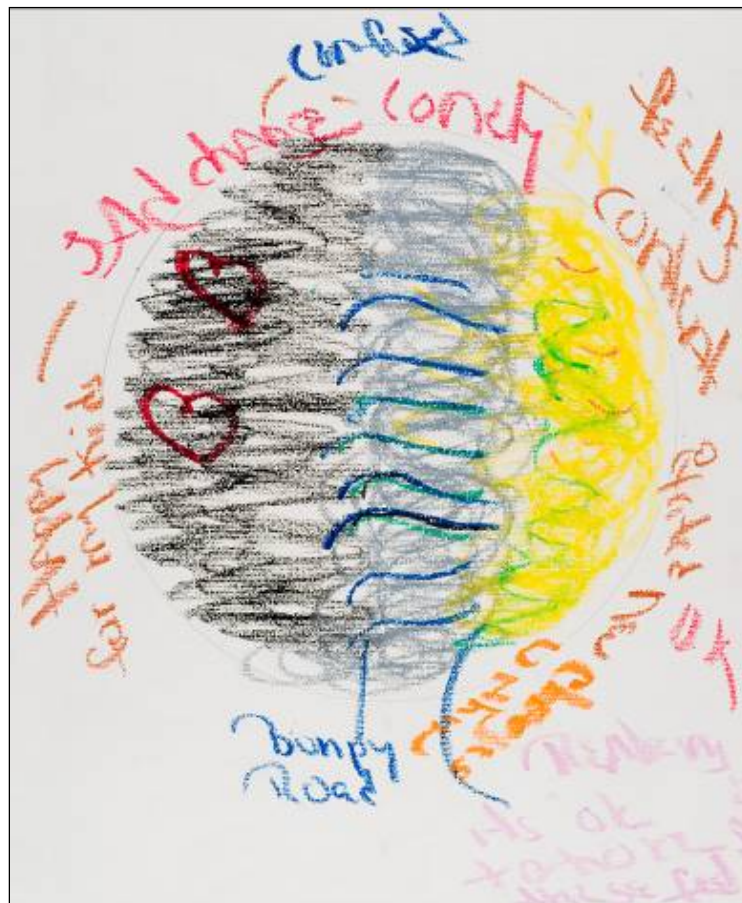
Individual Patterning of Women in Midlife Transition

Ava

Ava is a 50 year old Caucasian woman of Italian/Irish heritage. She is married with children who have left home for college and considers herself an "empty-nester." A hairdresser, Ava is very happy in her job. She describes herself as being very energetic, possessing a very positive attitude and outlook on life until recently. When the flier was

posted in her shop, Ava says she “took it and folded it up and stuck it in my pocket, because this is me. I need to do this.” At the initial interview she was anxious to get started and said she couldn’t wait. She had difficulty getting relaxed at the beginning of the meditation, but she says she finally was able to just let go. She was amazed at her newfound ability to relax, as she had not been able to do that before while attempting relaxation. During every phase of meditative mandala construction, she approached her drawings with energy. She chose her colors deliberately and always worked on her mandala from the outer perimeter toward the center.

Figure 2. Ava – Perception



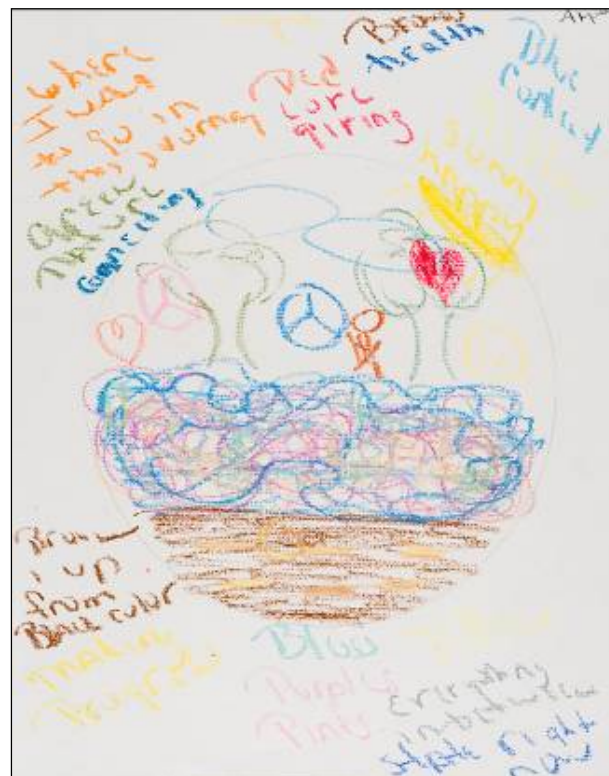
Perception: How does this mandala represent what midlife transition is for you?

For Ava, midlife is perceived as a time of change associated with fear of the unknown and the emptiness of being alone without her children. Ava had intellectually known she would reach midlife, but did not anticipate the mixed feelings, and the in-between emotions. The time of midlife for her is like a bumpy road where she experiences mixed emotions and says she doesn't know how she is supposed to feel. She is happy that her children are growing up and going out on their own, but is left with loneliness and sadness. The realization of being in midlife was sudden for Ava. As she watched her daughter leave to go away to school, she realized that she had just turned 50. There is movement from a place of sadness and fear, where change is seen as negative, filled with unknowns, and emptiness; going through and over a bumpy road full of mixed feelings of in between emotions both happy and "not yet happy"; toward a place "where I would like to be"[that is] "sunny, not feeling lonely or sadness for me, but an understanding this is a part of life." Midlife transition is a place of uncertainty of self where she is "not sure, [but I] hope I can handle change."

Researcher's perspective. There is a sense of movement from darkness toward the light or enlightenment. Even in the darkness though, there is evidence of relational attachment, love, wisdom and joy exemplified by use of the red color and the symbol of a heart. As changes begin to occur, comfortable hierarchies, established rules (of how one conducts life and business day to day) are becoming less restrictive. There is nothing to take their place, no experience in how to maneuver these changes. There is internal conflict of being in control and out of control of emotions. Not knowing how to express

them or how to deal with them. They remain tucked inside. There is fear of vulnerability in expressing them although a feeling of being cared for is suggested by use of the blue color for the spiral/bumpy road. The area identified as a bumpy road may also be seen as spiral that represents confusion and change. It starts at the bottom of the mandala which usually represents the unconscious. The spiraling upward might suggest something in the unconscious that beginning to move toward manifestation in the conscious. Represented by the bumpy road or perhaps a spiral, there is potentially something in the unconscious that wants to manifest itself. Then comes the realization (movement into the yellow) that there is protection, understanding, and security with husband and family. The segments in this mandala are vertical moving from left to right.

Figure 3. Ava – Experience



Experience: How do you know you are in midlife transition? Ava divides her experience of midlife transition into stages. “Where I started”; “Where I am right now” and “Where I want to be soon”. The first stage was filled with emotions she could not express. These emotions occurred without warning and with no predictability. The order and routines of her life were comfortable and secure. Though she knew someday she would be in midlife, she didn’t relate to it until the abrupt change in family structure occurred. When her daughter left for school, she says, “all at once I turned 50.” At first, she attributes the inner turmoil to suddenly being 50 years old, however says no one ever told her how she was supposed to be at 50. It was when she saw the recruitment flier for the study that she made the connection that she must be in midlife. “I saw the flier . . . posted in the shop where I work, and I took it right off the counter. I said, ‘I need to do this, this is me, this is where I am right now’.” The second stage for her is the here and now. She says letting go and trying not to need to be in control of everything is a big part of the experience now. This is really hard, but she is “moving ahead a little, understanding and opening up to new things in life, beginning some new relationships, but still sometimes tries to figure out where to begin.” She identifies what she needs to do to become who she wants to be. Learning to be with self is central to moving forward. She begins to focus on self-care measures, exercise, not feeling guilty for taking time for herself, and feeling comfortable “doing more by myself.” Not only is her focus turning inward, she is also examining her relationship with her parents, identifying the need to spend more time with them.

Researcher's perspective. The mandala continues to be divided into segments, but the blackness present in the first mandala has changed to brown. She mixes yellow with the brown which she says represents making progress and rising up from the blackness. The swirl of colors in the middle section shows that confusion is still a part of her experience. The different colors represent all her different emotions. She writes, “everything [is in an] in-between state right now.” The upper segment gives way to brightness with symbols of growth, love, happiness, and peace. This is how she wants to experience her future. The layers have shifted and now the movement is from the bottom to top. In the orientation of the mandala, the bottom hemisphere is usually said to represent the unconscious, while the upper hemisphere represents the conscious. Viewed in this way, the brown at the bottom suggests a fertile area where new ideas may be formed. The blend of swirling colors in the center layer may suggest confusion and represent the in-between time where discernment occurs and major decisions are made. The trees, heart, peace symbols, and sunshine all represent the growth that comes out of the process. The white, bright area represents heightened awareness of where she “wants to go in her journey” and her openness to a new way of being.

Figure 4. Ava – Expression



Expression: What is it like for you to be a woman in midlife? For Ava,

midlife transition is an identity change. For so long my biggest role has been mom and that has been my identity; now focusing on being a wife and figuring me out. Being a mom has been wonderful to me, but realizing I'm only 50 [and there are] so many things I want to do and now I can. Time with my husband, time for just me. As time goes on I hope, when I am ready, to enjoy the solitude. But if it takes awhile, it's ok.

Researcher's perspective. The mandala continues to be segmented into three parts and indicates her nature to put her life in order. It is clearly associated with identity issues, exemplified by the explanatory words tied to each segment. She is most comfortable with being a mom where she says she is "happy; having a full live." However, the swirling blue and purple colors associated with the caption "being a wife" suggest confusion as she begins to redefine the relationship with

her husband given the absence of daily demands of being a mom. However, in the upper segment she places “figuring out me” a place of prominence. The use of yellow in the upper half with shades of red/orange suggests the potential for the awakening of new insights into who you are. It appears the role of mom was about helping the children grow (green background); the role of wife as nurturer and companion (blue and purple); and now the role of self is moving “into the light” with a readiness to take on something new or to learn something new about self.

Appreciation of wholeness: Ava’s individual life patterning profile of midlife transition.

This program was perfect timing. Life was going smoothly for me then in August everything changed at one time. Seemed like just a whirlwind too fast –not really being prepared or not sure what was going to happen, “everything [is in an] in-between state right now”. I thought midlife, it would be easier because of my full busy life but I really had to step back and almost mourn which now I understand it’s ok. Now as life has settled down a bit I am grateful for what I have. I feel like I have been “just mom” forever which I love but I am still young and I can explore different things in life.

It’s kind of what you make of it. I could be sad and wish things would go back and be the same knowing that’s not realistic or be happy and proud for what I have done. Being in midlife can also be exciting. You have more time for yourself reading, walking, catching up with friends, volunteering, staying healthy. And when things all go smoothly step back, take a deep breath, meditate and know you can deal with what happens.

Sasha

A 53 year old who works in insurance administration, Sasha is a divorcee and has a daughter. She has recently embarked on a new career direction in the field of healing energy work. A friend had seen the recruitment flier and sent it to her. She was drawn to

the phrase “midlife transition.” However, it was the opportunity for her to explore her experience of midlife transition individually and with other women that motivated her to participate. Engaging in meditation presented no difficulties for Sasha. Mostly drawing from the center of the circle outward, she appeared to make deliberate choices of colors as she created her mandalas.

Figure 5. Sasha – Perception



Perception: How does this mandala represent what midlife transition is for you?

Midlife transition for Sasha is a time for learning to trust in herself in everything she does. It is a “wonderful place on the other side” of the physical and emotional hardships she has had in the past. Sasha perceives midlife transition as a time and place for healing where she is “supposed to be” as she has “paid her dues.” It is a place of comfort and

increasing spirituality. In this place, creativity is emerging and she is learning something new. Here she “takes the knowledge of her past and creates a new self” as she wants it to be. There was an awareness of outside influences while at the same time an inner power. While considering it a place of groundedness, Sasha also perceives it as a place where a sense of freedom and flow are present.

Researcher’s perspective. Sasha’s mandala is bright and exciting and gives the impression of transcendence. There appear to be mini-explosions, like fireworks, going off everywhere representing excitement and energy. The brightness of the multi-colored lines projecting upward and outward of the image of the hands represent readiness to learn something new or an ability to see things more clearly. The green lines suggest the power to heal, to create and to renew. The hands represent her presence in this place. Being red, they reflect life and energy which are symbolic of the healing energy work she is learning. The brown swirling lines that move upward from the hands and downward toward the bottom of the mandala represent connection between being grounded and her rising spirituality symbolized by the “beautiful clouds and birds.” Brown also symbolizes trustworthiness which corresponds to her perception of becoming more self-trusting. The blue lines and blue clouds also suggest creativity, inner listening, serenity, peace and transformation.

Figure 6. Sasha – Experience



Experience: **How do you know you are in midlife transition?** Sasha says her experience of midlife transition is about change that isn't complete. The ovals are in the shapes of eggs that symbolize fertility and/or birth. They have dark borders with lightness on the inside and symbolize her midlife changes. Experiencing midlife transition is the experiencing of many different transitions...family change when her daughter moved out, physical changes with menopause, spiritual change with allowing her "Higher Power" to be a major part of her life, boundary changes with not allowing others to determine how she reacts and behaves, work changes with adding energy work as an interest and

knowing that she is ok and in the perfect place. Her experience also includes a “spirit guide” symbolized by the “wooly mammoth” in the corner of the mandala. She is full of love and warmth and guidance.

Researcher’s perspective. This mandala speaks of the beginnings of new growth out of diffuseness. Multiple egg-like shapes represent great fertility perhaps for a new direction and creativity. The multiple colors may also represent the many different opportunities for directing change that is occurring. The eye is symbolic of Self which Sasha refers to her Higher Power. It also represents inward examination. Her wooly mammoth is happy and brown and correlates with the experience of trusting self found in the first mandala.

Figure 7. Sasha – Expression



Expression: What is it like for you to be a woman in midlife transition? For Sasha being a woman in midlife is a kaleidoscope of

changing shapes of different sizes and colors. Black signifies the dark, difficult times and yellow signifies bright happy times. Pink in the middle signifies my desire to have a heart centered life. I'm getting there, not by just one path, but several. All the pieces of my life, good and bad, are what make me who I am today. The smudges around the mandala are the smudges in life that I wish I could wipe away, but they're also part of what got me to this point in life. Transition can be beautiful and complicated and messy all at the same time.

Researcher's perspective. Some of the colors in the mandala are repeated which represents the "same issues that popping up again at different times and with different people". When she is true to herself there is happiness and is represented by the yellow.

This mosaic type mandala represents fragmentation. The disordered nature of the different colors and shapes symbolize the potential for entering altered states of consciousness where intuition becomes very prominent. The place represented by this mandala may be frightening because the once comfortable world may not make sense anymore. These asymmetric, chaotic shapes may represent coming in contact once again with unresolved issues. It is a place where resolution may take place. This mandala represents a natural process that is necessary in order for creation of something new.

Appreciation of wholeness: Sasha's individual life patterning profile of midlife transition.

Midlife transition is complicated for me. There are happy ecstatic times and sad depressing times. It's as if everything I've been and done is being examined to see which parts I want to keep and which ones I want to change. The examination can be

difficult but the rewards are great. As long as I remember that God and my inner higher self are in alignment, all is and will be fine.

I want to be totally in the new beginning stage [of midlife transition] but know that I'm not. There are things from my past that I think I've let go of, and then I find more layers of the onion that need to be unpeeled before I can really be free. Each layer that gets unpeeled and examined brings a little more freedom for me to become "the new me"

This is a time when I'm more fully aware that I won't live forever and want to make a difference with my life, beyond knowing that I did the best I could in raising my daughter. I know that if I have a goal, like learning and practicing energy work, I need to remember it is a priority. Otherwise it could be easy to get caught up in day to day activities and not fulfill what seems to be my purpose.

When I'm true to myself, I feel lightness and uplifting, and am grateful. The world is full of choices that can be new beginnings or more enrichment of what I already cherish.

Shannon

Shannon is 53 years old, is married, and has four grown children and four grandchildren. She works full time as a massage therapist and part-time as a day-care center inspector. Never really thinking of herself in midlife transition, her sister sent her the study recruitment flier by email. After seeing it, she was attracted to the phrase "midlife transition" and that the study would involve women getting together to explore their experiences. Shannon easily entered the meditative state during each phase. As she chose the colors she used in her drawing, her eyes were closed. She picked whichever one her hand rested upon. Her approach to drawing was from the center of the circle outward toward the perimeter.

Figure 8. Shannon – Perception



Perception: How does this mandala represent what midlife transition is for you?

Midlife transition for Shannon is about change and movement. It is fear of the unknown. A time of struggles to be moved through and finding out being different is okay. It has voids left by passing time and waves of new promise for the future. There are exciting new ideas and seeds to be sewn. The red fire of life and new energy burns intensely in midlife, but is balanced by the calmness of blue water. Ever present is the bright yellow light of promise. Shannon says when she turns her drawing upside down, the dark area in the center of the ovoid shape on the right is “disturbing to me. Almost something lost. Right-side up I don’t even notice it.”

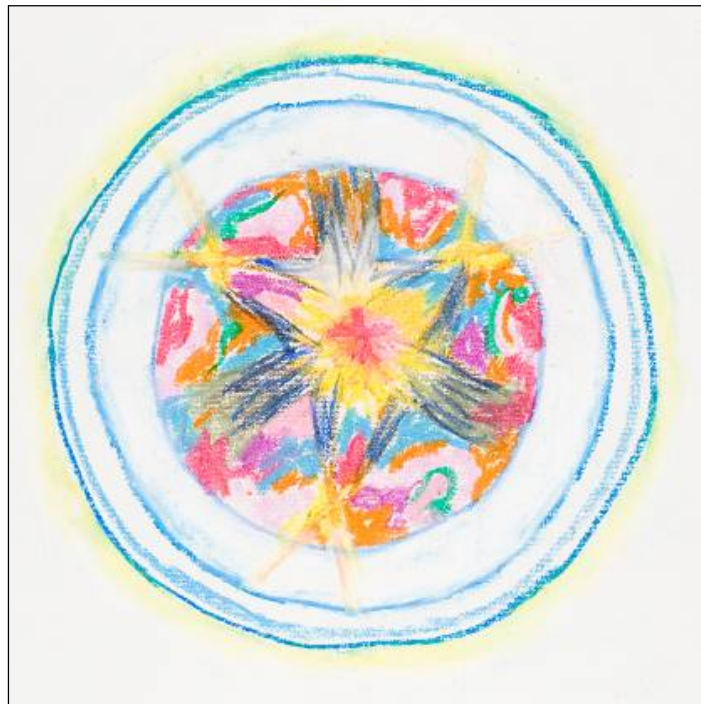
Researcher's perspective. Right away one sees a triangle formed by what appears to be a three petalled flower much like an orchid, a symbol of love, beauty, and strength. The upward pointing triangle is one of the classic forms in mandalas (Kellogg, 2002). It represents transition of movement into the conscious world and symbolizes the birth of something new or ready to emerge as in Shannon's reference to "waves of new promise for the future." The readiness to start something new depends on having certain needs met and having the energy to begin. During this time of transition primary relationships are important, care giving issues and needs for attention may become evident. The vibrancy of the colors used suggests intense energy in the movement and change that is occurring.

The number three is very evident in this mandala and symbolizes a dynamic process is occurring. Here there are three ovoid shapes, three circles, three segments of the mandala, and the triangle formed by the three petals. A predominance of three in a mandala suggests independent doing and thinking is on the rise. At the same time it represents a period of incubation during which time transformation occurs.

The bottom half of the mandala is considered to represent the unconscious world, the upper half the conscious world (Cox & Muller, 2008). By turning the mandala 180° the ovoid shape that is disturbing is brought out of the unconscious into the conscious world. As long as it remains at the bottom, it is not noticeable suggesting there is something new or ready to emerge, but the consciousness is not ready to receive it just yet. In this mandala lavender, purple, and blue are used often. These colors, used in this location, in these forms, suggest a spiritual awakening and tendency for mystical experiences that

may be ready to emerge. Perhaps they are beginning to emerge as suggested by the third ovoid shape in yellow and lavender located in the upper half of the mandala. The vivid colors of life (red, yellow, orange) present in the three segments between the ovoid shapes suggest underlying strength and capacity to nurture whatever new thing is about to happen.

Figure 9. Shannon – Experience



Experience: How do you know you are in midlife transition? Shannon describes what she saw in her meditation that she tried to capture in her drawing, yet had difficulty correlating the visual to her experiences of midlife.

The center was a ball at first and then came a flash of color-hot pink in the center with yellow around it. Three sets of arms stretched downward with yellow coming from them. Around them – a muddle of colors, most of which I captured. The circle around

that was very clearly bright white with light blue around the edge- a space- and two different color blue lines around. There was a yellow glow coming from behind.

For Shannon the colors held specific meaning: Blue was relaxing and calm, yellow was warmth and promise, white was purity, hot pink pleasure, red meant life, and green symbolized growth.

Researcher's perspective. Shannon's mandala is again one of transition and holds many of the elements of threeness as the first one drawn. This time there is a shift. The triangle is pointing downward and has a cross in the middle which is significant for being at a crossroads where there may be some resistance to change. The center point of red surrounded in the bright yellow of enlightenment suggests a fire of inner knowing bursting forth through the darkness and reaching out. The kaleidoscope of colors suggests new life (red), nurture (blue), and power (orange). There is also the presence of transformation (purple). All of this is happening deep within while being surrounded in the supportive white light. The crossroads and deep inner knowing seems to fit Shannon's statement in her journal of her experience of midlife transition; "I am beginning to think that midlife transition is discovering not only who you are but who you are not."

Figure 10. Shannon – Expression



Expression: What is it like for you to be a woman in midlife transition? For Shannon, being a woman in midlife is learning to accept the changes.

I feel I have more and different kinds of love to give. I am better able to receive love without fear or question. [Drawing the mandala] I felt love from many different directions—many different colors of love. Life has many faces. In midlife transition there is warmth and peace and calm but also guidelines.

Researcher's perspective. This mandala seems to be all about the heart at first glance. But the theme of the downward pointing triangle continues into this mandala as well, speaking to the ending of old ways and that change is coming. The heart in the center of the triangle suggests a pulling inward for reassessment of life and the colors

used suggest unconditional love (blue), growth (green), and transformation (purple).

There is a theme of the number seven in this mandala—seven pointed star as well as the perimeter of seven hearts. Seven can represent the completion of a cycle of time, that supports the idea of ending of old ways and ideas and that change is about to happen.

Seven also suggests sacred wholeness, the union of masculine and feminine or balance.

Seven often represents “finding ourselves.”

Appreciation of wholeness: Shannon’s individual life patterning profile of midlife transition.

My midlife transformation started at age 43-44 or around that time. My children were growing up and busy with their own lives. My husband and I had been so wrapped up in being good parents and making a living that we had not given our relationship the work it needed. It was at that time that I decided to do a 180, and went back to school. I was making my move toward individual-ness. Somewhere in that process I realized I could find and “be” myself and still be a good wife and mother. With some effort my husband and I re-discovered each other and since have been finding ways to help each other with our transitions.

One of my main issues in this process has been fear; fear of the unknown, the future, and most of all of being alone. Even knowing that the things you fear are probably not going to come true, I couldn’t let go of the fear. I am emerging from this now and feel I will always have the love and support I need.”

It is very liberating to feel like my world is wide open and without limits. I am who I am and am very comfortable with that. I wonder how much help I have gotten without knowing it from four beautiful grandchildren who have brought me new life and unconditional love and acceptance. I am truly a work in progress but have come a long way and do not dread the rest of the journey.

May

May, 51 years old and a mother of two, is attracted to the study because she wants to be able to help other women. Working as a receptionist, she saw the flyer in the office.

Telling her co-worker she might participate, she was told to first find out how much the gift card was worth. May says she told her co-worker that if her participation could help

someone, she wanted to do it. Her children told her she was past midlife, but May doesn't think so. She places a lot of importance on what she hears from her children about herself. May had difficulty at first getting into a relaxed state. Once there, she appeared to be very comfortable. Approaching the drawing, she first described what she wanted to do and said, "I do better talking...have a hard time writing down stuff." She was very concerned about doing it "right" and asks many questions about how I wanted her to do it. She began from the outside of the circle and worked toward the center.

Figure 11. May – Perception



Perception: How does this mandala represent what midlife transition is for you?

Midlife for May is a time of giving attention to what's on a person's inside rather than what on the outside. She says "I have peace in my heart even though I have wrinkles and

gray hair. The only thing that matters is that I'm happy with myself and how much joy I can give to my loved ones". Coming to the realization took years of struggles and hardships, but without them, "I would not see it today". The colors are significant; green is for growth that occurs in midlife, the white bird represents peace within, the purple flowers are beautiful and represent her grandmother who always grew them. Her grandmother was a source of strength and guidance for May as she grew up. May saw in her grandmother's spirit who she wanted to become. Her grandmother was very nurturing and giving. The red heart in the center reflects May's inner soul and the brown at the bottom represents all the struggles. Physical characteristics are represented by the dark brown on the sides for wrinkles and the gray sketched around the outside represents her gray hair. Midlife transition continues to be a place of struggle. She says, "I try hard to live each day-with no regrets."

Researcher's perspective. The general feeling coming from this mandala is one of lightness, peacefulness and calm, but with an undercurrent that something new is ready to begin. The heart is suggested to represent love and relational attachment. Red is sometimes thought to represent a sacred inner fire which she identifies as her inner soul. Perhaps the combination of the two indicates importance of these three attributes. Surrounding the red heart is bright yellow which universally means light and is consistent with her interpretation. It suggests a vitality and lust for life and perhaps as it is represented as spikes emerging from the heart this vitality is being projected from the inner soul. Three flowers are located in the lower half of the mandala. Usually this area is thought of as representing the unconscious. When representation of three is seen in

mandalas in can sometimes suggest that the independent thinking and/or doing is on the rise. I am reminded of two examples where this might be seen. One was when she told me about her children telling her that she couldn't donate her body after death to Duke, and the other when her friend told her she shouldn't participate in this study until she found out how much the gift cards were worth. In both instances she did not follow their commands and made her own decisions. She indicated both of these instances were big steps for her.

The color purple may suggest the beginning of personal growth, change, and transformation and something seeking to be freed. Again located in the unconscious area, there may not be complete awareness of what this may be. At the very top of her mandala is the use of bright yellow which again suggests light, but can also suggest the readiness to learn something new and a well defined sense of self. This may be consistent with her journal when she says she is happy with herself. She interprets the browns as representing all her struggles. Brown and black may also suggest soil ready for planting or opportunities for new beginnings which is also consistent with being ready to learn something new.

Figure 12. May – Experience



Experience: How do you know you are in midlife transition?

I know I'm in midlife transition because I feel that I'm 50 years old and the glass is half-full—or maybe a little more than half. We are only given a few years on this earth. Sometimes I wonder if I had realized how fast they were going by, but now they are going fast. I have the eye of God and his light on me. My tree is starting its leaves to turn for another season in my life and I have the promise of the heavenly father's love and guidance."Chronologically she identifies herself as a woman in midlife transition. There is an inferred sense of mortality and an implied connection to the spirit as in "we are only given very few years on this earth."

Researcher's perspective. There is an eye in the mandala that represents the eye of God watching over her and the events of her life. Emanating from the eye are rays of yellow implying warmth and a readiness to learn something new. The tree represents the tree of life or the tree of knowledge. The multicolored leaves amidst the green ones might

represent the mixture of new growth and aging. She refers to this image as a “turning to a new season in my life.” There is a container with contents held within that May identifies as “a glass half full” indicating a positive way of looking at her experience of midlife transition. The rainbow is in very vivid colors and may represent the joy that comes with getting on the other side of the struggles. In addition, the rainbow is a symbol of hope and promise.

Figure 13. May – Expression



Expression: What is it like for you to be a woman in midlife transition?

I see being in midlife transition as still a growing thing even though my roots are deep and my seeds have been already sowed. I still will be growing in spirit. Hoping to make the most of each day. I will always have God watching over me. I know I can't change the world, but if I can just make my own little corner better, I have made a difference.

Researcher's perspective. Spirituality appears to be the most dominate theme of this mandala. The green plant arising from the lower half of the mandala represents the growth. It appears to be connected to and arising from the deep roots of the unconscious area. At its base is a flower whose purple color suggests spirituality. The plant traverses the entire mandala from bottom to top and indicates spirituality that is coming more and more into awareness. The mandala continues its spiritual quality with the face of Jesus in its right upper corner. This theme appears to be carried over from the “all seeing eye” in the first and second mandalas.

Appreciating of wholeness: May's individual life patterning profile of midlife transition.

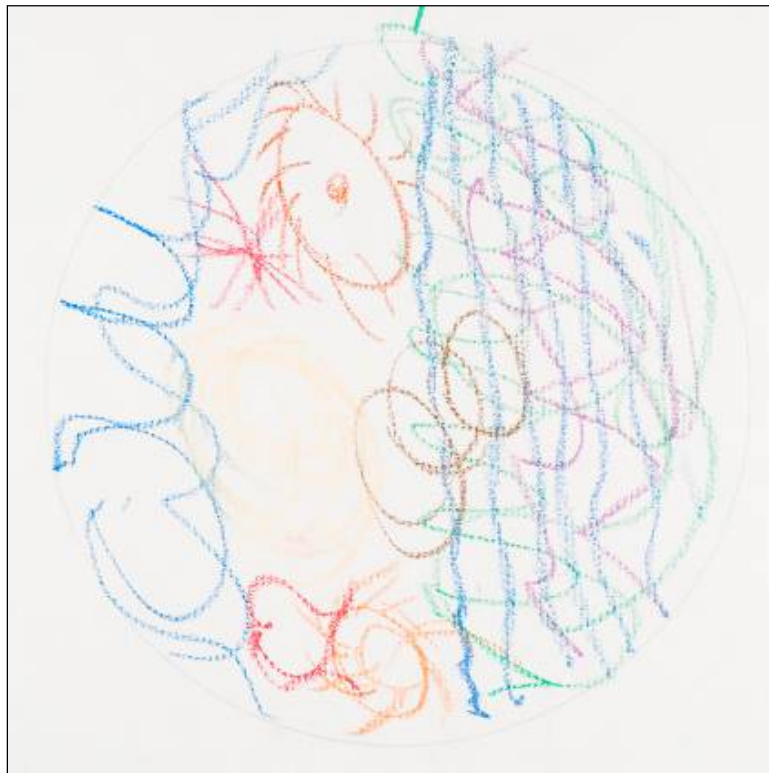
The mandala is round-like the circle of life. There is green for growth and a symbol of God. And my heritage-my grandmother's purple flowers and tree roots. And I have the promise of my heavenly father, watching over us always-the white dove and the rainbow.

Vickie

Vickie is 53 years old and works as a secretary. A divorcee with grown children, one of whom has moved back home, she also is having conflict in her relationship with her parents. She was sent the flier about the study from a friend and really wanted to participate. At the initial contact she discovered she had a conflict with one of the dates of the group sessions. Disappointed, she left and asked to be contacted if the dates were changed or if another study was done later on. A week later she called to say she had rearranged her schedule in order to participate. She felt it was something she really needed to do because she wanted to “figure out what's going on with me.” Her pastor had

said something at church that resonated with her about “getting new knowledge” that caused her to think more about the study. During the individual session as well as the group sessions, she entered into the relaxation without difficulty. At times she smiled during the relaxation. As she drew her mandala, she drew from the outside perimeter toward the center. She was very contemplative during her journaling.

Figure 14. Vickie – Perception



Perception: How does this mandala represent what midlife transition is for you?

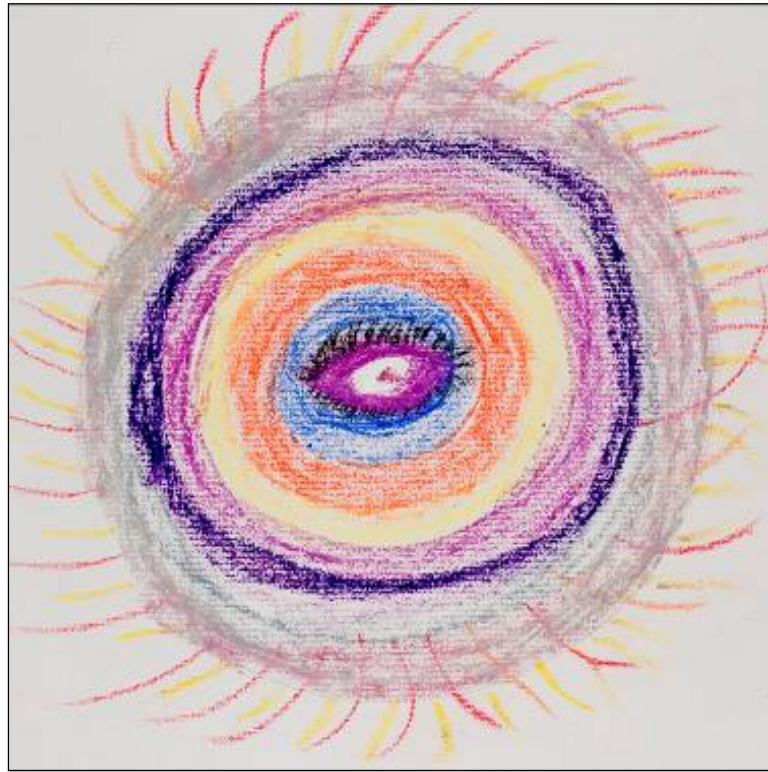
Transition for Vickie is a place of unhappiness, confusion, and chaos. It is a place of entrapment, caught between what she wants for herself and the demands placed on her by others. It is a place where the desire for a meaningful relationship resides. There is little

sun shining in this place and there seems to always be something dark coming along. Making decisions is difficult. This is a place of pain where relationships are examined and exposed. There is fear in confronting relationship issues. It is a place of frustration where the desire for control and peace conflicts with lack of energy and ability to think clearly.

Researcher's perspective. This mandala is split into two parts. On the one side there are ordered vertical lines indicating boundaries but superimposed and embedded are swirling lines that might suggest the boundaries are being challenged creating confusion. On the other side there are swirling lines that again suggest confusion. This is consistent with Vickie's journal entry that there is "confusion all around." Separating the two sides is an area of images that have universal themes. The eye in mandala represents the mirror to the soul. Vickie indicated for her it symbolized her need for time spent on herself. Brown, the color used to draw the eye, sometimes denotes trustworthiness. It may also imply being stuck between impulse to go and inhibition not to go. This may correlate with the feeling of being trapped that Vickie mentioned in her journal. Taken together, it suggests the need for time for self is time for inner self-connection to the soul.

The red heart represents love, relational attachment, and joy. The red starburst is symbolic of a sacred inner fire and reminds Vickie to "look to God and keep him close." Orange can symbolize ambivalent feelings or energy invested in relationship with a father figure. It suggests a situation that needs resolution. This may be consistent with Vickie's conflict with her parents. Yellow is warmth and source of light and enlightenment and a readiness to learn something new.

Figure 15. Vickie – Experience



Experience: How do you know you are in midlife transition?

Midlife transition right now is a reflection of my whole life. What has happened in the past, present, and future? I have feelings of sadness. I'm happy at times and I'm just glad that I'm here alive and well. My patience is very thin. I don't tolerate a whole lot of mess right now. I want retirement and to work at my own business again, but it's taking time getting where I want to be right now. I'm past time for my retirement on my job, but cannot; due to needing the money and not having things in order to do so. I realize I need to take control of my life. I've got to get things in order. I must take time for myself and do the things I would like to do. I have to let go of things that's holding me back. Stop taking on other people's problems.

Researcher's perspective. The layers in this mandala suggest wanting and needing protection and perfection, that is, the idea that everything has to be a certain way before

one can act. In addition, the layers represent vulnerability and insecurity and struggling between feeling powerful and powerless. There is a strong need for control. Immediately one sees in this mandala the eye in the center. This symbolizes both the “all-seeing eye” that watches over and protects as well as the mirror to the soul examining and discovering Self. The eye looking from the inside outward begins to see things differently. Here one learns to face and confront ones fears.

Figure 16. Vickie – Expression



Expression: What is it like for you to be a woman in midlife transition?

Midlife transition as I now look at it is a time to get to know me. Although I feel so much in my body and mind; that I cannot explain is a process. It's a time to focus on things that's important to me. To learn how to meditate and relax to hear from God. To see things differently. Life doesn't have to be struggles; it's the way I have been handling things and the way I look at things coming my way. Taking a step to know

why I feel the way I do, is a step for inner peace. To let the sun shine in my life and give God the Glory. It's good to bring awareness and thoughts of wholeness into my life. I don't have to carry the past reflection around with me any longer. My world is beginning to look a little brighter. The clouds are beginning to move over and the blue sky is setting in. The sun is shining brighter and the flowers are blooming. Thanks for this opportunity to reflect on the now and my future, not the past. I feel free to face my parents. My daughters and grandchildren are going to be ok. I want God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit to lead and direct my path. This I know is the only way to travel this road we call life stuff. I was feeling weak, but now I'm feeling strong. Thanks for the awakening.

Researcher's perspective. This mandala is one of brightness, happiness, loving, and reaching upward. It reflects new growth, new beginnings, new insights, and life. The trinity circle suggests spiritual presence.

Appreciation of wholeness: Vickie's individual life patterning profile of midlife transition.

As I reflect over my journals, I feel like I'm trying to do too many things at one time. Dreaming, dealing with emotions, feelings, family situations, job and just being able to make it in everyday life. I need to meditate more, do the things I like to do, not just the same old same thing day in and day out. It's like I'm trying to please and fix things for everyone else and leaving me out. I desperately want change in my life. Wanting to share and do things with someone. I feel a great need for protection and feeling that I'm not alone. It seems as though things I'm trying to do around the house and things I'm trying to work out with the business I want to do is taking so long. It's like a roller-coaster ride. I want to make things better in my life and I basically know how, but there are roadblocks and I feel I don't have the strength to go on. It seems hard knowing what I want in my life. Only if things would start happening on a positive note. I feel things would get better. The main thing is that I want my house back, without anyone living with me. Maybe then I can think clearly. I need to start thinking and doing things differently to make the change I need in my life.

Phoebe

Phoebe is 66 years old and believes herself still to be in the process of transition. She is retired from working with children in the school system and is a mother and

grandmother. For a number of years now, Phoebe has participated in numerous artistic, self-discovery, or creative workshops as part of her transition. At the beginning of the meditation, she had some difficulty getting into the relaxed state and said she had a hard time “getting out of my head.” Once relaxed, she was fully engaged in the meditation. At times she would smile. She approached all her mandalas in the same way drawing from the center toward the outside perimeter.

Figure 17. Phoebe – Perception



Perception: How does this mandala represent what midlife transition is for you?

For Phoebe midlife transition is process of natural passages and is a place of conflict, healing, and restoration. “Within the twisted roots there is a tree-the tree of life that existed before my midlife. The tree reminds me of one from my past- with a near perfect

circle etched in its bark. The lime green represents crisis, healing, and light.” Midlife is a time of discovering one’s physicality, inner wisdom and strength, and spiritual connection. “Brown represents the grounding of earth, the purple within the heart is wisdom and the red represents the heart and passion. The blue border of the circle represents heaven.”

Researcher’s perspective. The tree is considered a universal symbol of all encompassing life. The blood red of the trunk might suggest the sacred inner fire of transformation marking the way to enlightenment. But it might also represent energy that is rooted in and conscious of the body. It might also suggest the power of healing and will to thrive. The yellow/green of the leaves suggest an “ability to see”, intuition, or the sacred fire of self-actualization. Yellow may represent readiness to learn something new, the power to heal, create and renew. The purple heart suggests a link with spirituality, enlightenment or something seeking to become free. There is an emergence of energy, perhaps the explosion of inner knowledge that bursts forth.

Figure 18. Phoebe – Experience



Experience: How do you know you are in midlife transition? Phoebe experiences her midlife as freedom and contentment amid a process of unlayering of self discovery. “I notice things peeling, fading. I experience energy not needing direction. It is movement and color. There is the experience of letting go and feeling the force as restrictions are released. There is contentment in this part of my transition.”

Researcher’s perspective. There is a purple spiral moving clockwise, swirls of smaller spirals in colors of red orange, blue, lavender, spots of green in the spaces. The spiraling movement represents change, examination of relationships of the relative past-present-future. The tornado like movement of the spiral suggests disruption, no

stagnation or staying still. The green dots within the spiral suggest green germination seeds of discovery and knowledge. Spirals in mandalas represent movement toward connecting with a deeper part of self that is beginning to surface. What was once in the unconscious seems to come into conscious awareness.

Figure 19. Phoebe – Expression



Expression: What is it like for you to be a woman in midlife transition? For Phoebe, being in midlife transition is about integration. Expressed as “cleaning things up”, It’s about “male and female finding each other.” Balance-Wholeness-Alpha and Omega. I am comfortable being a woman in midlife transition. I am growing into self-acceptance.

Researcher’s perspective. This is a classic mandala with a symmetrical figure filling the circle. It represents a sense of completion of goals, satisfaction, fulfillment, harmony,

and balance. One's identity is established in the world. It is a place of creativity and there is a need to engage in new projects or hobbies. The mandala represents a place and time for willingness to help others, enjoying accomplishments, and openness to starting something new in order to maintain creativity. The colors used in this mandala support her sense of self-acceptance and integration. Lime green represents nature, growing, and the power to heal, create, and renew. Yellow suggests the ability to see things clearly, potential for self-actualization, and intuition. Orange represents power. Purple represents spirituality, transformation, and personal growth.

Appreciation of wholeness: Phoebe's individual life patterning profile of midlife transition.

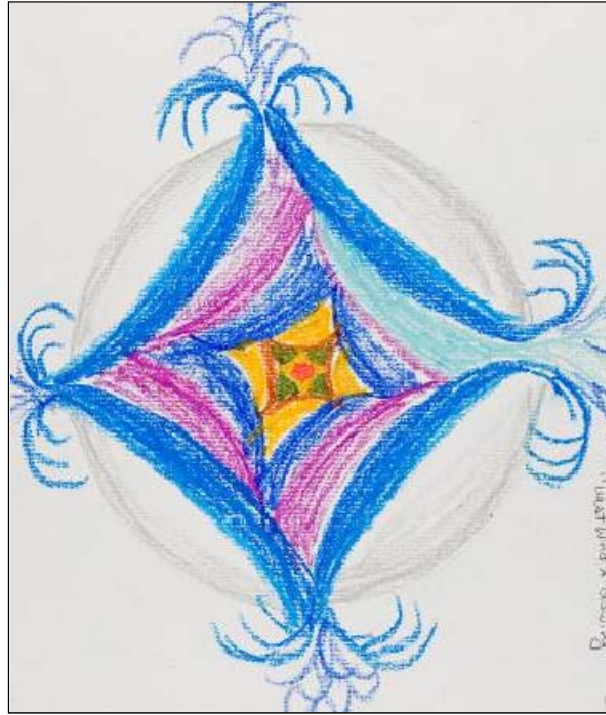
At St. Mary's House . . . again I come... I realized this week: my experience with Mary and Jesus are integrated, are integrating. Sitting in the alcove last time in alignment with the cross and icon of Jesus. The weaving amongst the thorns, the crown—on the floor level and looking toward the “door” with the simplicity of mother and child representing Mary. Jesus was part of my story having gone to the Freewill Baptist church in my youth. I am accepting of the explanation of the icon for others and how it is represented to their individual expression. Mary has become important for me as I seek healing and balance. I have called to her—and I call to Jesus, master healer of the universe when I needed. So I have found a harmony within as both reside in me and do not complete I plan to take pictures today—of the art expressed through creativity.

New projects or hobbies. The call to follow the call to growth and change. I knew it the first week. I have known it and the spark was ignited within the mandala. I knew to ask for help-guidance-someone to explore possibility and greater development- a mentor. Should I go to school? Take a class? Explore sculpture. That was Hanoch's prediction. Does it call to me? I suppose I will not know unless I explore. Writing? Teaching? Facilitating? Providing a sacred place for others to throw off what holds them down—the things that bind and hold us back? Creative movement was my passion at the school. I fulfilled part of that passage but having the groups in the gym, I eventually felt I was running them through the classes, not time to be one on one or small groups. No opportunity to be present with the students struggling and losing a bit of themselves- along the way-a need to hold sacred presence so they might remember who they are. Helping others, being present, and being present for myself has required skill- requires a lesson in balance.

Lynn

Lynn is a woman who is 52 years old and works as a textile designer. She is divorced, has no children but has been in a nurturing relationship with her soul mate for the last six years. Last year her best friend, her father, died unexpectedly and she continues to grieve. She's feeling restless and sad and beginning to question what is there to life. While at lunch one day, she saw the study recruitment flier... She was drawn to the flower on the front and when she read the information said to herself, "I have to do this." In fact, she didn't write down the contact information and thought she'd remember it if it was meant for her to participate. She particularly liked the comment in the consent form that referred to "validating unique experiences of women." She expressed amazement that this kind of study would be coming out of nursing. Entering into relaxation appeared easy for Lynn. When it was over and she began to construct her mandala, she was unrushed, deliberative, and focused. Her approach was from the outside perimeter moving toward the center.

Figure 20. Lynn – Perception



Perception: How does this mandala represent what midlife transition is for you?

For Lynn midlife transition is a time for

re-centering, rebalancing, reorganizing, re-emerging, resonating, restocking, reassembling, rejuvenating, rearranging, reprioritizing, reprogramming, refreshing, renewing, recreating; It is time for all of these things to take place. The time is now!

It is a time for discernment:

Knowing that life is finite, no longer the limitless potentialities of youth. Where do I wish to devote my precious energies-resistance is energy tied up. What will bring me the most satisfaction in life? What is it I'm supposed to be accomplishing?

A time for self-examination seen as un-layering to reveal new parts of the self:

This is a time of life to re-assess . . . a multilayered curtain being drawn back to reveal a hidden jewel in the center. Could it be this curtain is on the stage of life? What will they think of me? Will I measure up? Is my worth based on what I look like and that's it? I do, therefore I am. Is this every woman's mantra?

A time for examination of relationships with family, self, and career:

I've had to do what I do to survive . . . in my marriage, in this life, in my career. When will it be time for me? I'm tired of being strong, responsible, and dependable. Just look at my sisters! They both seem to find people to take care of them and to help them out. Yet I do remember telling myself (as a child) that I never wanted to become dependent on a man! 'Nuff said there . . .

It is a time of recognizing buried potentials:

All my creativity now is within a very narrow framework. Same old, same old. [It's] kind of ironic to think of being creative within a box. [It's time to] open the door to possibilities that lie within me. I've got great instincts. Use them! There is still time. Free up former self-imposed 'shoulds'. Enjoy life. Be happy. Choose joy. Be grateful. Express that in my creative endeavors. Energy will abound! On the right path . . .

Researcher's perspective. This is a classic "squaring of the circle" (Kellogg, 2002) mandala and represents a state of making sense of one's life and world. It is a place where the autonomous self emerges. Examination of relationships, both in the personal life and in the career, becomes prominent in the thought processes. The orientation of the square within the circle places the points in the directional positions of north, south, east, and west. The points resemble portals and all are the same colors and have the same degree of openness except for the one pointing east. The eastern portal is wide open and is turquoise in color. The eastern position represents illumination. Turquoise represents

healing that is necessary to get on with one's life. It can suggest a need to distance oneself from painful events or resistance to emotion. Lynn writes in her journal regarding this part of the mandala as, "escaping pressures, like air from a balloon." The metaphor of "layered curtains drawn back to reveal the hidden jewel" is well represented by the color in the drawing. Dark blue suggests creativity and inner listening. Magenta/purple represents personal growth, transformation, and something seeking to be free at some level. This correlates with an entry in her journal that refers to re-assessment of her life in order to re-emerge "as a butterfly from this shell of an existence." Other colors of significance include gray, representing neutrality or transition between the known and the unknown. Gold represents completeness and integration of opposites, and wholeness. Red represents for Lynn a "precious jewel-like life itself." It also represents a sacred inner fire of transformation and an alerting to new awareness. The significance of this mandala design is that it places importance on the person as the creator of what she wants to become.

Figure 21. Lynn – Experience

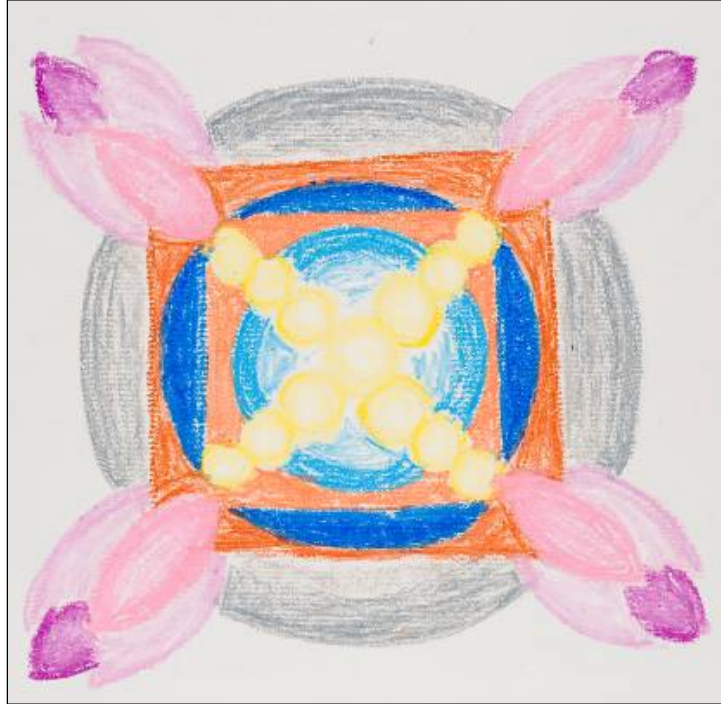


Experience: How do you know you are in midlife transition? Lynn experiences midlife as self-examination and discovery. There is increasing awareness of “being lifted above earthly concerns and being open to wisdom and direction from on High” represented by the “purple aura the mountains” while remaining “grounded in Mother Earth” represented by rust-colored mountains. She realizes her fertile imagination (symbolized by the wheat on the upper perimeter and the fertile fields in the center) and its potential for generating new growth (the green fields). Her midlife experience includes examination of what she has accomplished through her hard work in her career, at being a “good and responsible daughter and sister” represented by the “hands cradling the earth and doing the work to bring forth ideas into fruition.” It is a search for identity and

purpose in life, guided by a “higher source of strength symbolized by the eye” in the center above the mountains.

Researcher’s perspective. The reddish brown mountains extending upward with the arc of purple suggests an emergence or ascension of conscious awareness out of love-out of the sacred fire of inner knowing. The new awareness is being cradled by the supportive hands at the bottom of the mandala. The presence of hands in this formation suggests a readiness to be more active in relationships and to engage in life’s activities through new projects or occupations. They also are symbols of influence over one’s surroundings and the ability to create. The green fields suggest growth and the potential for new beginnings. The oblique lines may suggest paths to inner knowing or may represent a rough, rugged plane symbolic of struggles occurring in midlife. The eye in the center, between the dark perimeter, splits apart the darkness of unknowing—an opening in the dark.

Figure 22. Lynn – Expression



Expression: What is it like for you to be a woman in midlife transition? Being in midlife for Lynn is expressed as a continual process, represented by the “gray sphere behind that seems to indicate the process is still going on and is yet incomplete.” It is expressed as metamorphosis, “an unfolding like lotus flowers opening, the flower buds are opening.” Midlife is a crossroads where inner wisdom that comes from being unique is found. “The round ‘pearls of wisdom’ in the center formed a cross with the largest in the middle. The solid layering of circular and square shapes seems to indicate one way to fit a ‘square peg into a round hole’. My life’s endeavor it seems.” For Lynn midlife is a reintegration of “pieces of myself and yet remembering bits of wisdom gained as early as childhood, before the world got a hold of me” and expressed as “completion – morphing into completeness, wisdom, and mastery.”

Researcher's perspective. There are repeating patterns of “squaring the circle” in this mandala. Repeating patterns suggests recurring issues that need resolution. However, this theme also suggests that new knowledge is being assimilated and an integration of receptive and active parts of the self. This correlates with Lynn’s “striving for . . . reintegration pieces of myself.” The center cross suggests being at a crossroad which is in general a place of major transition. The theme of major transition is also borne out by the surrounding gray background of the mandala. The cross also indicates inevitable change and is a place of grief over loss of loved ones or for the changes that are occurring. The cross may also symbolize a more philosophical or spiritual state of mind and the sense of hope and fulfillment.

Appreciation of wholeness: Lynn’s individual life patterning of midlife transition.

The process continues...

Since shortly before my 50th birthday two years ago, I have been wanting to retreat and have time to assess my life so far, but work, family issues relationships have all kept me way too busy. Yet these mandala and writings seem to indicate that this process is on-going underneath the surface- at the being level even if not actively at the doing level.

Humankind has always had to work to survive. Yet, in amongst that striving, we seek to find ways to make it all worthwhile: relationships that lift us up, beauty, humor, music-these are what help make life WORTH living, not mere existence.

The past couple of years, I’ve been grieving my father and working nose –to- the-grindstone. How often did my father say to me,” Baby, I wish you didn’t have to work so hard” And how many times did he tell me how proud he was of me! Yet it isn’t all about money in the bank or success in the world’s eyes...

It’s time to take better care of myself. My body has supported me and understood now for a while that I was doing what I needed to do to get by, but now I need to take better care of it. This will include:

setting boundaries on my time at work, and how much I take on to do
eating on a regular schedule; healthy life giving foods that nourish me
giving thanks for those things I eat drink and even the air I breathe

meditating, and drawing, and writing
exercising-even if it is only a 10 minute walk each day to clear my head and look at the sky.
Stretching- get back into a yoga class- make a commitment to be there
soaking in the tub and giving myself a facial at least once a week
drinking a glass of hot water with lemon upon rising every day, and staying hydrated
cultivating creative outlets at home-getting around to doing all those things I used to enjoy that I've said I want to get back into again
I am at a crossroads- requiring the "courage to create" what my life will be from here on out, definitely pulling inward in search of renewal in order to put forth new shoots for growth in new directions. It's time for hope arising out of hopelessness.

Lillian

Lillian is 54 years old. Currently unemployed, she worked for many years in medical insurance, both for an insurance company and for a medical practice. She became a widow over 20 years ago, never remarried, and has no children. Sometimes as she reflects on her own midlife she wonders about what the transition had been like for her mother. She wonders what it would have been like for her mother to have had the opportunity to talk about her experiences like this. Lillian says she hopes nurses will be receptive to whatever information comes out of this study, but most just "poo-poo midlife stuff." Relaxation did not come easily for Lillian. She was restless and wanted to continue to talk, mostly about the process of the study and wanting to do it right, not so much about her experiences. After she said she was ready to begin, relaxation was easier. She appeared to become deeply relaxed. As she approached her mandala, again she was concerned about "doing it right." Once assured there was no right way, she began construction of her mandala. Very deliberating in choosing her colors, she worked from the outer perimeter toward the inside. This was a common approach for her with every mandala.

Figure 23. Lillian – Perception

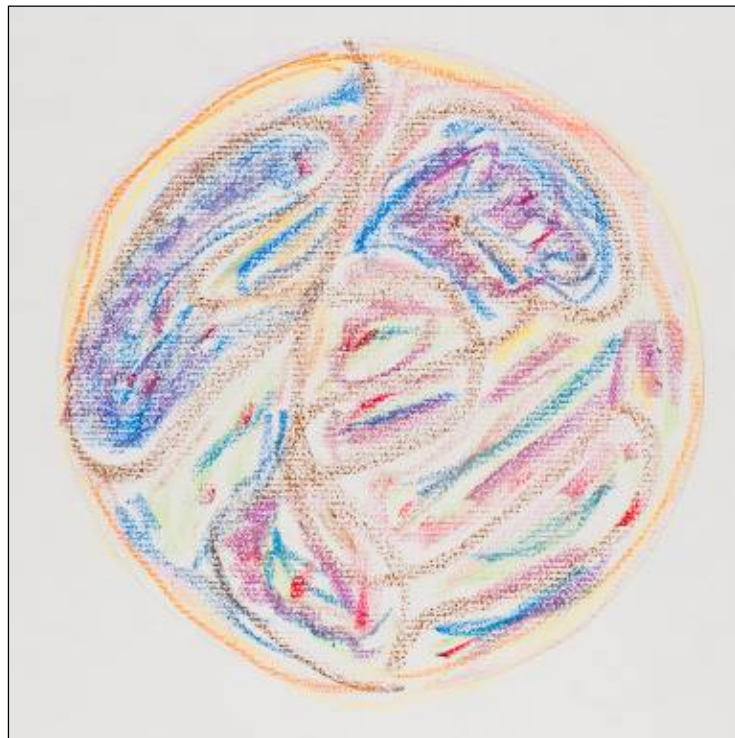


Perception: How does this mandala represent what midlife transition is for you?

For Lillian midlife transition is a time of discovery described as “excitement” filled with “a whole new set of thoughts and feelings.” It is time for reflection on events and experiences of the past and how they influence her life in the present, “Drawing on past experiences is reassuring as they show me decisions of events that have been right and/or decisions that I have made that taught me lessons.” She also sees midlife transition as “an important crossroads (not crossroad)...with several elements of the unknown.” However, she perceives the transitional crossroad as a place over which she has control as reflected by the colors used in the drawing, “I vary my path of old and new with all this color.”

Researcher's perspective. There is lightness in this mandala and a sense of emergence shown by the image rising through the center. The emergent image also indicates a new sense of integration and order arising out of chaos. It also suggests a deepened sense of spirituality and heightened sense of intuition. The use of yellow predominates and might suggest a new awareness of self-individuality and a readiness to learn something new. Blue can represent inner listening and peacefulness. Red symbolizes life force or the fire of transformation and intense emotions. Pink may represent the “child in us” and might suggest one look for what is new and in need of protection in oneself.

Figure 24. Lillian – Experience



Experience: How do you know you are in midlife transition? Lillian experiences midlife as a journey of reflection taken along a path that has many branches. “The path is more defined and takes on a trail type quality. I repeat areas of travel...sometimes retracing steps to explore [myself] more in depth and to reassure nothing is missed.” She experiences her midlife transitional journey as an ability to make choices along the way. “For me, ‘path’ is more informal with less defined margins. ‘Road’ is more formal as in paved with distinct markings of how to proceed and more structure as to how to continue.” In considering how to continue along her path, her experience is one of confusion and turmoil, “I somewhat feel torn between what I want to be as a woman of mid-50s as opposed or in comparison to a woman 20 years or so my junior.”

Researcher’s perspective. In this mandala there is undifferentiated movement represented in many different colors of life: purple of transcendence, blue of nurturance, and yellow of enlightenment and the readiness to take on something new. The brown lines suggest grounding, connection, and pathways. This mandala represents a place of receptivity, relaxation, and inspiration. Here the possibilities seem limitless and one learns to be discerning, discriminatory, and to develop boundaries. This certainly seems to connect with Lillian’s idea of “going back to giving attention to areas that I want to explore more in depth while the retrace is to reassure of nothing missed.” In addition, it goes along with “I sometimes feel torn between what I want to be as a women of mid-50s as opposed or in comparison to a woman 20 years or so your junior.” There is creativity here. In addition there might be difficulty differentiating between self and others (one might lose oneself in another). It is a state of being rather than doing.

Figure 25. Lillian – Expression



Expression: What is it like for you to be a woman in midlife transition?

For Lillian, midlife is expressed as journey of discovery with increasing awareness of her potential for integration of the knowledge and experience of the past with that of the present and her future as her chronological age advances. “It is to age chronologically of course, but to take with me the thoughts, feelings, and actions that have been mine through this life that have and will continue to help sustain me.” It is a journey of reflective examination of her past, present, and future, “sometimes I need to pick up something totally new, but not to the point of discarding the tried and true, ever looking to journey on as fresh, curious, and open.” It is a journey of discernment as she examines her values,

What values do I hold onto? What values need a fresh look? How do I continue to my life's travels to its end? Some days I don't know which path, which way to go. My decisions are more weighed. Don't waste precious time but don't overlook where time needs to be spent developing new growth.

Researcher's perspective. The tortuous lines in this mandala appear mostly connected but leading out to the perimeter of light and brightness. There is a kaleidoscope of colors in the background. Small dots of red are scattered within the background, suggesting seeds of new life potential, circuitous lines that suggest confusion. The center is orange, the color of power. This mandala continues the earlier theme of discernment ("decisions are more weighed"), deciding which values to hold onto, continuing to hold on to the ideas, thoughts, and knowledge held and trusted.

Appreciation of wholeness: Lillian's individual life patterning profile of midlife transition.

Discovery seeds have been planted. I am trying to nurture them without being in a state of 'standing watch.' I want to go further down my life's path and then again visit my new garden. I wonder how much of that path will be worn with every notice to new growth? Are some growths for me to incorporate in my life's path or are they just situational or seasonal.

'Live, Love, Laugh' now different than the woman I was 20 years ago. Core values have been added to during the years. Some things are not as important now while others take on a more heightened position. Love has grown in many directions. It has longer, deeper place of importance in my life. Love of parents, siblings, a child, friends and loving memory of a deceased ex-husband. Laughter- I laugh more at myself – my silliness. My mistakes, my shortcomings. I seek the balance of a mature woman's outlook as opposed to being juvenile and again to appreciate joy and its simpleness a child sees.

I feel enriched by my life's experiences. My tool box is becoming more equipped to make a midlife's entry into the remainder of my life. I appreciate the offerings of the older wiser woman in my walk as well as the curiosity and discoveries as shared by younger women. Now let's mold everything together. How, how long, when, where .

. . well, everyday. Careful, but not too careful so growth and discovery of midlife will be green, growing.

Lindsey

Lindsey is 52 years old and works in computer technical support. A divorcee, she has a grown son, 20 years old who no longer lives at home. She was also suffering from grief over losing her mother some years before. Lindsey was drawn to the study because it was about women exploring their experiences together and looked forward to the opportunity to participate. She was also curious and thought it was interesting that it was a study coming out of nursing instead of psychology. Lindsey found out about the study through a friend. Entering a relaxed state of meditation was easy for her. With a lot of noise going on outside the building, she seemed not to be bothered. As she approached her mandalas, Lindsey always worked from the outside perimeter in toward the center.

Figure 26. Lindsey – Perception



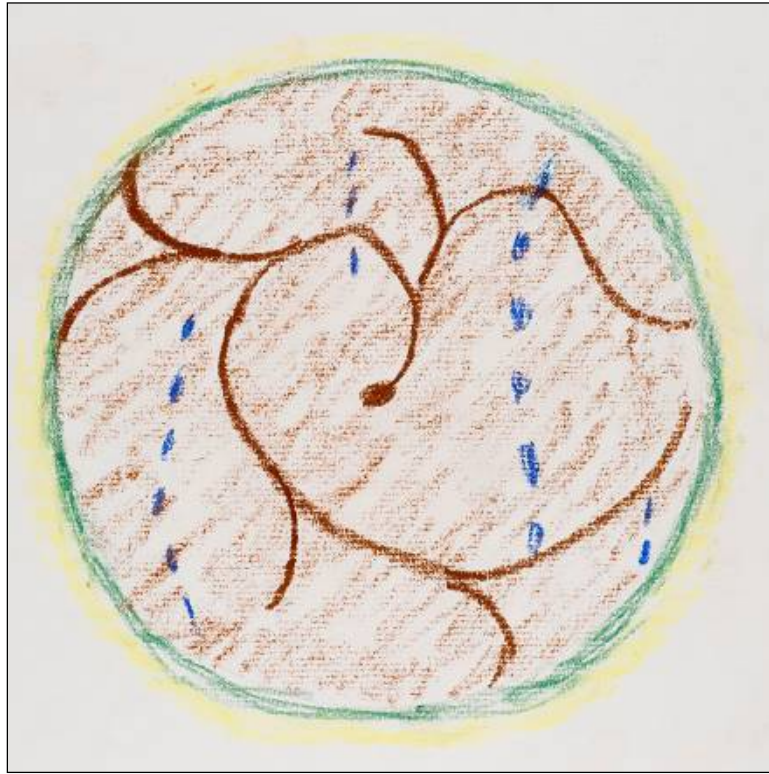
Perception: How does this mandala represent what midlife transition is for you?

Lindsey's perception of midlife transition is of a time for inward reflection and self discovery, represented by the image an eye, "I think this will be a time I can and will do more self reflection than I have been able to do in the past 20 years" and contemplation represented by the color "dark purple-contemplative." It is also a place of layers of self, deep within that need exploration. She states of this place "feeling the need to explore layers, of my life, interest, needs, wants . . . also need to practice focusing." Another perception of midlife transition for Lindsey is a sense of movement reflected by the center image a "sea creature" and thought of midlife as "going off in multiple directions, different parts of my life, how it's nice to have different things going on (different aspects)."

Researcher's perspective. In this mandala there is the sense of emergence coming from the center. The image in the middle appears like a starburst against a bright sunlit sky. The wavy lines give the impression of movement rather than the feeling of being stuck. The use of lavender sometimes suggests energy in a highly refined state of spirituality or spiritual awakening. This center is surrounded by green that might suggest self-renewal (which might be in tune with the sense of earth and earthiness interpreted by Lindsey) and the ability to protect and care for self and others (the gentleness of the olive green). Blue in mandalas suggest feeling supported (referred to by Lindsey as calm and peace) and transformation. Yellow suggests a readiness to learn something new (perhaps what she senses as striving and energy), which is the important task one needs to learn

during this phase . . . that is how to take what is learned during transformation and prepare to begin the new cycle of recreating self.

Figure 27. Lindsey – Experience



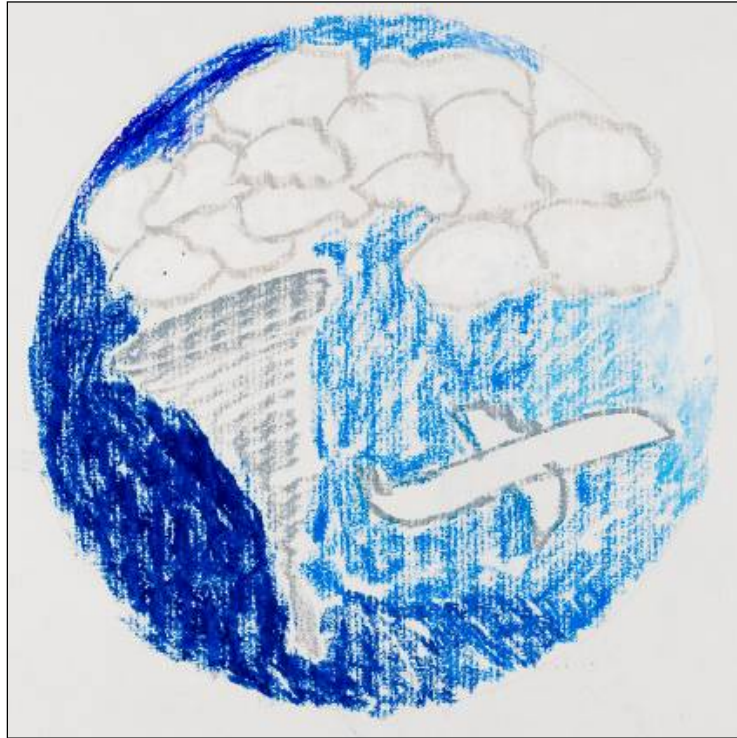
Experience: How do you know you are in midlife transition?

For Lindsey, the experience of midlife transition is one of regret related to “the path not taken and the possibility of wrong choices made.” It is a time for recognizing the “different paths travelled, forks in the road, and how you end up at different places depending on your choices.” It is an awareness of arriving at a crossroads where she faces choices made for good or bad and realizing “that I have to move forward one way or another.” At this crossroads there is examination of past relationships and the experience

of sadness and regret for not making the most of those relationships. There is also examination of and the sense of regret over “choices made along the way that I wish I could change.” There is also an experience of hope, represented in her drawing by “that outer rim as a transition area. It could be a boundary, holding me back, but I think I made it green (my favorite color ☺ to be more hopeful that, rather than a boundary, it is instead a more inviting transitional area.” Midlife transition is itself something to be experienced and moved through toward a happier place.

Researcher’s perspective. The background of brown might indicate fertile ground. The lines are brown, swirled, and connected. They are circuitous and lead from the center outward and from the outer rim to the center. Using brown may indicate grief or loss and is in line with Lindsey’s interpretation of sadness. These lines suggest connection from the outer world to the inner spirit, perhaps representing different options at midlife or different ways of seeing which is supported by Lindsey’s reference to “different paths travelled.” The green outer rim suggests an area for growth, which for Lindsey is a transitional area. Yellow border/edge suggests surrounding the self in light/enlightenment—brighter days on the horizon and is consistent with Lindsey’s “happy place.”

Figure 28. Lindsey – Expression



Expression: What is it like for you to be a woman in midlife transition? For Lindsey, being in midlife transition is confusion with the “fury of a tornado, a feeling of spinning and turmoil” counterbalanced with a sense of calmness. It is movement from sadness to happiness that she represents in her mandala as “shades of blue progressing from dark to light as it moves from left to right. Midlife transition is like a patchwork quilt or stained glass mosaic in a palette of grays and white.”

Researcher’s perspective. This mandala is in three shades of blue—dark blue suggests a smothering kind of love whereas medium blue suggests feeling nurtured; light blue –unconditional love. Perhaps in midlife transition you might feel all three. The tornado suggests turmoil—or time of change. The color gray usually represents transition

so the gray tornado might represent “the whirlwind of transition.” The puffy white clouds appear as a mosaic which suggests connectedness. The airplane might suggest wanting to escape the whole process.

Appreciation of wholeness: Lindsey’s individual life patterning of midlife transition.

What resonates with me from mandalas and journaling . . .

- Reflection about my mother and regret over things missed in that relationship
- The process-still wondering about what I attempted in session # 3 –trying to come up with images to draw-wondering why it didn’t work as well (or so it seems to me)
- Notice about all 3 that I seem to be inclined to add ‘hopeful’ elements to counter balance the sad or otherwise negative elements

Common themes?

- Movement
 - waves, streaming rays of sunlight
 - meandering paths
 - tornado and plane; also change of shades of blue-from dark to light
- Multiple layers/pieces
 - Layers in bottom “ocean area” and anemone
 - Paths
 - Cloud pieces/ mosaic

Thoughts about midlife transition for me?

- Definitely have feelings of turmoil
- Feelings/thoughts of wanting something more...striving
- Recognition that am in process of a journey.

Samson

Samson is 56 years old, a mother, a grandmother, and a career woman. A friend sent her the study recruitment flier and she was very excited about coming together with other women to explore what she was experiencing in midlife. She shared that she chose the pseudonym Samson because for her it represented strength. Before starting with the

initial mandala activity she wanted to share a little bit about her life. She is very proud of her 36 year old son, his wife, and two children. Sharing that she never married her son's dad, she related how important it was for her to help him become successful. At 50, she married and soon afterwards lost her job of 25 years due to downsizing in the company. Even though the company offered her a transfer, moving or commuting was not an option. When she refused to accept the transfer, her husband of only eight months asked her to leave. For two years she lived with a girlfriend and when financially able, moved out on her own. Now she says she is beginning to grieve that divorce and that this opportunity for self-exploration is timely and that it is "going to be healing." After sharing this information, she easily entered into the relaxation. Samson approached the construction of her first mandala working from the perimeter toward the center. The final two she worked outside the circle and covered the entire page with her drawing. When her drawings were complete, she was very contemplative while journaling her reflections.

Figure 29. Samson – Perception



Perception: How does this mandala represent what midlife transition is for you?

Midlife transition is a struggle with identity for Samson. It is a struggle between what she is and what she wants to become. It is a time of confusion, anxiety and fear.

I am in turmoil, but I seek peace of mind. All of these faces are me-sometimes- all but the green face/yellow hair all in the course of one day! Tossed to and fro! Yeah! Not a good thing. I want to be light and airy-free of the wandering thoughts going through my mind. I want to be yellow and light, yet I am now a yellow wannabe with lightening flashes of red and black –anxious – wanting to be loved but afraid-I am feeling black yet good at portraying vibrancy –lively-smiling but denial of growing old-without love of a man is wearing and causes me pain. I want to feel and look like the little innocent girl-green-full of life not old and cast aside! I am bruised but not broken.

It is a time of many competing emotions reflected in the colors used in the faces:

Yellow is peace, contentment, friendly, love, calmness, happiness-that's what I would like to be. Red and black: turmoil-chaos-lightening strikes – terrible thoughts that keep me anxious. Red: vibrant and alive – a big part of who I am, desirable-attractive. Black is depressing-dead and ugly-despair-tears-unhappiness and not good. I don't want to stay in the blackness. I want out. Green is energy and youth and new playful-fun-smiley faces! Precious! I want that feeling and happiness back. All of these are me except green-Green is where I want to be!

Researcher's perspective. The predominant theme of identity is the representation of self using different faces. The number five in mandalas is suggestive of the stage of coming into full identity and is consistent with the interpretation of the mandala given by Samson. The faces represent different ways in which she is struggling with her identity during this time of transition. The red face is smiling. Red usually means life and a strong energy to thrive. It might also represent the fire of transformation. Even though black (used for hair) may represent depression and anxiety it might also represent the expectation of something new. The yellow face with red/black hair is also smiling. Yellow represents warmth, source of light, energy, power, and emotions. The black face is frowning and might represent sorrow, fear, or an expectation of something new. It might also suggest vulnerability which might be consistent with the identity confusion. The yellow face is smiling. Yellow usually suggests awareness of self and development of consciousness. It can suggest that intuition is on the rise and one is ready to learn something new or to start a new project. Yellow also suggests energy, power, and emotions. Green face/yellow hair is smiling. This face has all the attributes as yellow but also includes green that might suggest the need for caring for self and others. Green

suggests a power to heal, create, and renew reflected in her journal entry, “I am alive and will be whole. I am unique. I am worthy of wanting. I am valuable! I don’t like this stage of my life – it is hard to bounce back-but I will. I have a lot of love of family and valuable friends. Treasures! I am thankful!”

Figure 30. Samson – Experience



Experience: How do you know you are in midlife transition? Samson experiences midlife transition through an increasing spiritual awareness and strengthening that takes on an extremely personal and direct connection. She experiences it as a time for cutting away what no longer works for her in her life (the brown leaves falling from the tree) and

of restoration as she realizes her potential for new growth and life (the little tree inside the big tree).

Look at my God! Surrounding me with Love and protection! He is Life-Green. He is concerned with all aspects of my life! He is Awesome. He shines Brighter than the sun! His arms encompass me with Energy-my Source of strength. Restoring my soul! He is bigger than life! He is peace, warmth and light!

Midlife transition is the experience of facing new challenges and being unsure of her ability to meet them. She experiences vulnerability and fears the unknown but is keenly aware of God who supports and encourages her. “I know I need my God to help me. I have turned to Him in a way as never before knowing he is the only One that can!”

Researcher’s perspective. In this mandala I see a small tree inside the big tree. The little tree stands strong inside the big tree, not in its shadow but in unity with the big tree. The little tree is inextricably connected with the big tree. There are rays of bright light surrounding the little tree-protected by the big tree. The waters out of which the trees stand are rough and turbulent. The little tree is vulnerable but protected. There is a spiritual awareness implicit within this mandala that no matter what the trial or turmoil that might arise, there is support and protection on a deeply spiritual level. Samson is the little tree in unity with her increased awareness of spirituality that is within and surrounds her (the big tree), supporting her throughout her transition.

Figure 31. Samson – Expression



Expression: What is it like for you to be a woman in midlife transition? Samson expresses midlife transition as a war in which she is a lone warrior. Covered only partially with armor (represented by the gray outlining the figures), she suffers wounds that will “serve as reminders of the battle fought”. The armor is removed little by little throughout the war. Afraid in her vulnerability, she seeks protection and comfort but her vulnerability becomes more exposed. With each exposure, she becomes more aware of her femininity (represented by the pink “doll” that is being carried). “Vulnerable because I am a woman-trying to fight and carry the femininity along with me.” Recognizing her femininity as always being with her, she begins to redefine who she is. She battles with

trust issues and finds herself sometimes off-balanced but finds inner strength and wisdom as she fights. “After each battle I grow stronger and wiser but distrusting of man-yet wanting to trust at the same time.”

Researcher’s perspective. The warrior goddess emerging through the fire of womanhood is immediately seen in this mandala. There is movement of the figure from right to left. She gains strength with each new wave of fire represented by the figures becoming more prominent. The figures are pink and gray. The pink represents both femininity and vulnerability. Is the goddess trying to preserve femininity? As the warrior goddess moves through the battles she becomes stronger less vulnerable (the figures get larger as they move across the page). The gray represents transition. The fires burn with less rage with each movement of the figures toward the front but the flames burn lighter and brighter which may be a clue to enlightenment and growing inner strength.

Appreciation of wholeness: Samson's individual life patterning profile of midlife transition.

One should not have to struggle so much with identity, emotions/feelings in middle age-that's what I think and definitely should not have to struggle with rejection. Hard to recover. Even the physical look of yourself is hard to deal with-the mirror is no longer your friend. How can you be improved? Hard work. Strenuous exercise is not your friend either. One thing I have learned – being able to laugh at yourself-helps to relieve the pain! You begin to accept yourself as you are- improve as best you can and hope someone can and will accept you as you are. You pray you don't become old looking and bitter-that women can be trusted with your inner thoughts and feelings we are all wounded to a certain degree- we all want to be seen as treasures! Valuable! Precious! That men are not the enemy-they are struggling and wounded also- and harder for them to reveal their vulnerability! They carry that little boy around too.

It is good to have a strong foundation in God my Lord and Savior during my midlife transition! Where would I be? What would I do? I would not have an idea of who I am. Nor of what I can become! Jesus is my rock-my strength. I know I need Him more and more. My daily bread.

I am holding onto my inner strength-my femininity-my little girl-my womanhood-all of them are me. Not looking so much at my faults and shortcomings, but more of my strengths-keeping myself encouraged. Accepting myself and acknowledging I am me – as all of us are unique! I am woman-growing older-hopefully wiser. Still like to laugh and sing Still the vulnerable feminine one-the little girl in me, getting stronger-battled scarred-not as unbalanced. Willing to grow even more-the thoughts of being stuck and stagnated where I am is not a pleasant thought. I prefer to continue to move forward-facing challenges ahead-perhaps afraid-but still moving forward-even though afraid! But Father God-may I have a little rest and relaxation?

Group Patterning Profile of Women in Midlife Transition

Multiple common themes emerged as the women shared their individual patterning profiles. These were clustered into five major themes and are self-examination/discovery; emotional carousel; spiritual awakening; strife/struggles; journeys.

Table 1. Group Theme Extraction

Group Themes	Sub-themes
Self-examination/discovery	Physical changes, need for exercise, self-care-“need to take better care of myself”, inward reflection, depression, self-acceptance, remembering our femininity, mortality, increased creative awareness, new growth, growing in wisdom, disjointed; awareness occurs in layers- peeling away, onion syndrome; accepting change; healing the inner in order to heal the outer; life is not limitless-deciding where to devote our energy; identifying things that hold me back; pruning away of what doesn’t work anymore
Emotional carousel	Love/hate; joy/sadness; fear of –letting go, growing old, the unknown, of becoming bitter, of being alone; confusion-out of control/chaos; humor relieves pain
Spiritual awakening	Defining values-examination of relationships, making a difference in life is important; God is more important now than ever, God is in control, hopeful, integration-finding balance/harmony; “evolving into a whole”;
Strife/struggles	Hard times; turmoil, working hard (in career, being a mom, a wife), too-busy to reflect; can’t get it all done, why do we have to work so hard; striving with conflict of emotions; wanting more in life; all are wounded to some degree
Journeys	“traversing the path”, crossroads, “many paths to take”, “navigation through the passages”, “it is the courage to make the journey of self-discovery we all share”; “which way next”; unique to each woman;

A mandala of fabric and other embellishments was constructed by the women that expressed the patterning of midlife transition for this group of women. As the women worked together they deliberated on the colors and symbols that would represent the themes previously extracted from their individual profiles. After the mandala was constructed, each woman reflected on the finished project and wrote her interpretation of how the mandala told the story of midlife transition for the group. The researcher, through synoptic examination of the mandala and every woman’s interpretation of it,

created the group life patterning profile of midlife transition. Every woman had included the five overarching themes that had been extracted from the individual profiles. These themes were expressed through colors and symbols. The charts of these colors and symbols along with interpretations follow.

Table 2. Participant Interpretations of Colors

Colors	Participant Interpretations of Colors
Brown	Fertility-new ideas, creativity, the path, grounding, feeling satisfied,
Yellow	Happiness , new awareness of self, sunny place, peace, contentment, calmness,
Purple	Passive, wise being, insightfulness, spirituality
Green	Growth, new learning, exploring the new, heal, create, and renew, full of life, energy, youth, restoration
Blues	Nurturing, being nurtured, calmness, protection
Orange	The unknown, uncertainty; power within
White	Spirituality, spiritual awareness
Pink	Child in us, innocence, femininity,
Red	Excitement, anticipation, understanding, life force-will to survive,
Black	Sadness, fear, change, unknown, empty, mourning, mortality, anxious, turmoil, chaos

Table 3. Participant Interpretation of Symbols

Symbols	Participant Interpretation of Symbols
Layered background	Onion syndrome, peeling away the old ways, layers of life, pieces of our life, levels of awareness
Path/tree	Journey of life, tree of life,
Flowers	Transformation, new life, “coming into full bloom”
Heart	Love, self-esteem, self-care
Pink ribbon	Femininity, self-examination
Little girl	Femininity, happiness, innocence
Faces	Hard times/happy times
Spirals/shells	Turmoil , confusion, tornadoes
Jewel	Reward, award from the struggle, treasured and valued
Clouds/lightening	Doubt, anxiety, conflict
Sun Rays	Hope, happiness
Cactus	Struggle, hardships, pain
Bees	Too busy; working hard; why do we have to work so hard
Feather	Question mark, which way next?

Figure 32. Group Mandala



Viewing the constructed mandala simultaneously with the women's interpretations of the colors and symbols resulted in a synopsis that was sent to the participants for validation. The following synopsis, that is, the group patterning profile of women in midlife transition, is the final outcome of that dialogue.

How does this mandala tell our story of midlife transition?

The background of the mandala is a layering of multiple fabrics of many colors. It represents the layers of our life that we examine and peel away along our journey of self-discovery. They represent examination of the relationships between us and with others in our life. We are grateful for the relationships, but see them in a different light. As a group we realize that all are wounded in some way or another. Healing the hurts, disappointments, and disillusionments that are on the inside are necessary to healing what's on the outside. We gain courage to move away from relationships that are not beneficial or to improve the ones that we have neglected during the busyness of our lives. With each layer we learn what we think and believe about ourselves is more important than what other people think.

The journey itself is represented by the brown path that traverses the circle from the bottom to the top, symbolic of our movement toward a heightened awareness of self. We all are unique in our journeys and our paths take different directions. But at the crossroad of midlife, we encounter our past, present, and future. As we meet our past, our emotions sometimes threaten to overtake us. We mourn parts of our past and experience sadness

and despair as we ask, “Where have we been?” We remember the blackness of trials and struggles and the sharpness of experiences that have caused us pain.

We are in turmoil and confusion, as we ask, “Where are we now and how did we get here?” We are sometimes caught in the twisting spiral of confusion as what has been familiar and comfortable suddenly seems to disintegrate into chaos. Though sometimes filled with self-doubt, we work very hard to be successful in our many roles of life: successful career women, good mothers, good wives and partners, good daughters. Dwelling in our present, we come to realize we are not alone in our journey. Along with other women who are moving along the path, we are increasingly aware of God’s presence within us. We desire order, control and purpose in our lives and look to God for hope. The awareness of our spirituality and its importance to us is increasing; we are evolving into a whole person. Our identity is no longer defined by the roles we fill as we now appreciate the wholeness of who we are. We are finding balance between whom we are to others and who we are to ourselves. There is a sense of balance and integration that is occurring.

We look to our future, realizing our mortality and that our energy is not limitless. We are both sad and excited as we explore; where are we going from here? We fear the change, the unknown, the letting go, being alone, and becoming bitter. We sense an inner power to create the future direction of our lives. As we identify what holds us back, and prune away what no longer fits, we recognize ourselves growing in wisdom and strength. The jeweled award for our struggles, our hard work, our perseverance, is also a reminder that we are treasures. Reflected by the red hearts and pink ribbons, we examine the

physical nature of our transition. While agreeing that “the mirror may not be our friend” we are able to accept ourselves as we are. At the same time we identify our need to improve our self –care. The needs to exercise, meditate, and relax and to make more time for ourselves for de-stressing are common to us all. Reflecting on our past, dwelling with our present, and imagining our future we begin to experience renewed energy, rising creativity and are able to see new possibilities for the rest of lives. We are transforming . . . we are coming into full flower.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study supports findings from previous research that women engage in self-exploration. It is well-known that as women enter midlife, in particular, the contexts and conditions of their lives create opportunities for self-reflection. In many ways this study provided a milieu for capitalizing on these contexts and conditions to enhance self-reflective activities. The unique contribution of this study was to offer women a systematic strategy for self-exploration and to explore and describe the process as part of the inquiry. With a focus on the midlife patterning of women, the study allowed participants to consider their experience in the larger context of their lives. While engaging in the process of transition, they were simultaneously observing the process, knowingly participating in discovering their inherent wholeness, and becoming empowered to direct the changes that were occurring.

The purpose of this study was twofold: (1) to develop and implement a participative unitary appreciative inquiry group for women who wished to explore their experience of midlife transition, and (2) to develop a profile that represented the life patterning of women, both individually and collectively, that emerged from the process. Rogers' Science of Unitary Human Beings provided the conceptual underpinnings for the study. The principles of homeodynamics provided the lens through which change and transition were viewed. Cowling's (2001) method of inquiry, participative unitary appreciative

inquiry (PAUI), which was derived out of this conceptual foundation, provided the orientation, the process for exploration, and a way for viewing and making sense of data generated called synopsis. Beginning with the underlying assumption that human beings are inherently whole and irreducible to systems or parts, women engaged in individual and group experiences that focused on their wholeness. This meant de-emphasizing and re-contextualizing signs and symptoms associated with midlife by focusing on an experience that brought attention to the wholeness within their lives. Mandala construction was chosen as the focal point for the inquiry experience by providing a way of sustaining attention on the patterning and wholeness of women's lives.

Mandala construction was a unitary process that facilitated a deeper connection with self-exploration. Construction began with a lightly pre-drawn circle that symbolized unity. The mandala provided a symbolic space and time container within which the self-in-relationship to the universe could be explored. Meditative induction aided in the unitary process by assisting participants to focus on a question related to an element of informational patterning (experience, perception, and expression) of their midlife transition. While considering their midlife transition from these three different elements of patterning the women colored shapes and images within the circle as they quietly engaged in inner exploration. The figures or images symbolized perceptions, experiences, and expressions of midlife transition. Narrative reflection by the participants provided their interpretation of the images, figures, and colors used within their mandala in relationship to the specific focus of inquiry. The outcome for each woman was an individual life patterning profile co-created by the participant and researcher.

Participation in group dialogue and discussion related to individual profiles resulted in a group patterning profile of midlife transition.

A unitary view of human existence assumes inherent wholeness which drives the exploratory process. However, this view is not mainstream as current hegemony supports a particulate view of the self. The normative view prescribes developmental stages to describe life's events and experiences. While three of the participants had engaged in self-help/ self-awareness activities in the past, none of them had previously participated in this type of inquiry. Initially, they were afraid of "doing it wrong" or not "doing it the way" the researcher wanted it. This barrier to connecting to wholeness was mediated by assuring participants that there was no right or wrong way "to do" the exploration. Therefore, inherent wholeness was not easily assumed by the women in this study, rather each woman discovered wholeness through participation in patterning appreciation.

Patterning Appreciation: Discovering Wholeness

Patterning appreciation occurs through simultaneous recognition of three inextricable sources of information [perception, experience, and expression] available during the process of patterning manifestation. Each of the mandala/reflection activities afforded the opportunity for the elements of informational patterning to be explored individually as well as in juxtaposition to and simultaneously with the others. The images, narratives, and reflections of each phase for each woman along with the reflections/interpretations from the researcher were all synoptically processed to provide information related to each element of informational patterning. The final individual life patterning profile was a

synopsis of all three elements created by the participant. Patterning was manifested uniquely by each woman and their individual profiles have been explicated earlier. The mandalas and the reflections on them suggested a move from a fragmented view of self toward an appreciation of wholeness.

The first mandala/reflection activity began the process of exploration and addressed the question related to the woman's perception of midlife transition. Perception is making sense of the experience of the patterning. It involves reflecting on the experience while actively engaging with the experience and is conscious knowledge of the experience (Cowling, 1997). All of the women perceived the transition as a time of increased awareness of changes occurring in their lives. These changes were almost palpable as one described, "there is this inner movement—I can't stop it, things just aren't the same." Others described it as an "inner shift" that was occurring and they "struggled to make sense of it." For others, it was the sense of internal chaos and confusion that couldn't be contained. It was further described as feeling unbalanced and out of harmony. Many of the phase one mandalas contained images of spirals, wavy and curly lines which are classic elements of conflict and confusion. In their narratives they spoke of identity challenges.

A fragmented sense of self was borne out in their drawings by layering of colors upon which they reflected in their narratives by the use of terms and phrases such as "need for integration", "pieces of my life", and "there are multiple layers in my life." Carefully examining their roles in life, they became like archaeologists as they excavated the layers of self in relation to self and others, their beliefs and values. Some referred to this as

“pulling back the curtains” of her life and trying to make meaning of it all. One woman claimed her identity had been so embedded in being a mother, she really didn’t know who she was since her “children were all gone away.” Now she found herself trying to “re-establish her relationship with her husband.” Others described it as peeling away layers of the old ways and old relationships. In this process of excavation, they were discerning what beliefs and values were true for them now and which ones to carry forward with them into the future.

The second mandala represented the experience of midlife transition. As an element of informational patterning, experience is defined as the “raw encounter of living with sensation” (Cowling, 1997, p. 133). It is the living of and being engaged in patterning as it unfolds. A few referred to an awareness of their chronological age but none considered it a sole indicator of being in midlife. This is consistent with a unitary view that the “evolution of life is a dynamic, irreducible non-linear process.” A few referred to physical changes such as how their outward appearance was different than a few years ago. However, none dwelt there as a major experience of their transition. The experience of midlife transition for most of these women was described as travelling along life’s journey. Each was unique in her experiences. Multiple fears were associated with self-discovery, such as, fear of letting go, fear of growing old and becoming bitter, fear of being alone, and fear of being out of control. Others experienced regret over past decisions and mourning the loss of what they may have missed. While vulnerability and a sense of woundedness were not currently being experienced by some of the women, they all agreed that at times they felt these phenomena as well.

They experienced midlife transition as being at a crossroads where they simultaneously celebrated and mourned events and memories of their past, examined new identities here in the present, and attempted to discern the direction and purpose of their lives and futures. They described a change in their energy level and an inability to do all the things they used to be able to do. For many, being in this process was like being on an emotional carousel where extremes of moods were experienced almost simultaneously. At times there would be feelings of joy, but sadness was lying just beneath. Freely experiencing love was hampered by undercurrents of anger over what they felt they had missed in life. However, almost every woman mentioned a rising awareness of spirituality and in particular the presence and importance of God seeing them through the transition.

The final mandala represented expression, the third element of informational patterning. Expression of the patterning is how the perceptions and experiences of the patterning become manifest. Mandala construction provided an aesthetic vehicle for bringing into conscious awareness the experiences and perceptions of midlife transition. Images that emerged from these mandalas reflected both inner and outer journeys. For example, brown purposeful lines represented “paths” taken in this life that have led them to where they see themselves to be. The image of an eye occurred in multiple mandalas and represented inner reflection as well as a rising awareness of spirituality and its importance in their lives. Images within the mandalas, such as upward pointing triangles, erupting volcanoes, and up-stretched arms reflected the potential emergence of some new

insight or for creativity. Journalled interpretations by the women became more suggestive of a heightened sense of spiritual awareness and presence.

How the woman approached its construction provided some insight into the depth at which her discovery of patterning of wholeness was occurring. After entering into a relaxed, meditative state, the participant would begin sketching and coloring her mandala. Some would begin on the outer perimeter and work inwards toward the center, while others would do the opposite. Seven of the women approached the mandala construction by beginning from the perimeter of the circle and working inward. According to Huyser (2002) coloring from outside toward the center suggests a need or desire to make sense of, or connect what is known in the external world to, what is known within the inner self. It is reflective of introspection and a need to focus and gather energies, thoughts, and ideas.

In contrast, beginning in the center and coloring outward is thought to free up hidden inner energy and is an attempt to bring into emergence knowledge of the self that lies in the unconscious (Huyser, 2002). The other three women approached the mandala in this fashion. These were the same three women identified at the beginning of the study who had engaged in prior activities of self-discovery. For most women, their approach remained consistent with every mandala construction. However, the time spent constructing the mandala became more contemplative and deliberative.

By the end of the study, through participation in synopsis of all elements of informational patterning, the women began to have a sense of wholeness as well as a sense of empowerment to direct the changes occurring in their lives. They referred to the

inquiry process as one of “healing from the inside out.” Even though none of the women indicated a need for healing at the beginning of the study, they came to realize a rising awareness of wholeness that some referred to as integration. Through appreciation of wholeness, they discovered change was unpredictable and continuous and that human existence is always in a state of flux. They also came to the realization that they were not required to be a passive recipient of change. Rather, they could participate in its direction. The emergence of these insights occurred through participation in unitary patterning appreciation and is what Cowling (2000) referred to as healing as appreciating wholeness. Healing as appreciating wholeness forms the foundation for his emerging theory of unitary healing (Cowling & Repede, 2009). Unitary healing in this sense is realizing wholeness rather than recovering from an illness.

Group Patterning

Every mandala/reflection activity was followed by discussion both formally within a group circle and informally in conversations that occurred during lunch and breaks. The individual life patterning profiles created through synopsis of all the elements of informational patterning created the foundation for discovery of the group patterning of midlife transition for this group of women. As the women shared their individual discoveries within the group, they made another discovery. Though the events and contexts of their lives were unique, they found companionship and connectedness through participation in the group inquiry process. Common themes emerged that reflected the collective consciousness of the group related to life patterning of midlife

transition for the group. Collective consciousness is a “matter of appreciating fully all the information with which we are provided both within ourselves and from others and the environment” (Cowling & Repede, 2009). Through group participation in theme extraction from the individual patterning profiles, discussion of their meanings, and being open to new thoughts and ideas regarding their transition, themes that resonated with the group were selected. This represented knowing through unitary consciousness and “opens the doors of perception to appreciate wholeness of human life and what is perceived as important to the participant” (Cowling and Repede, 2009). The themes that found representation on their mandala were those that the group felt to be most descriptive of the group’s profile of midlife transition.

The background of multiple layers represented the excavation process of self-discovery. The brown swatch of fabric that traverses the mandala from top to bottom was first conceived to represent the path of life’s journey of self-discovery with its many side roads. The forks in the path represented the crossroads where decisions had to be made. However, the path took on a second meaning during the mandala construction process. Engaging in conversation and sharing of perspectives while putting together the pieces of fabric, the women discussed how the path also became representative of the tree of knowledge. The branches led upward and outward toward the particular areas of knowledge gained along their journey. The branches extended beyond the circular boundary into the white satin framework that surrounded the circle. This area was considered to represent spiritual awakening, an awareness that all were acutely experiencing. Symbols were included that indicated some of the common experiences of

their journey: happy times/hard times, turmoil/confusion, working hard, rewards for hard work, being treasured and valued, importance of self-care, doubt and anxiety, and hope and happiness.

The unitary appreciative inquiry process had been transformative for the individuals and the group and they represented this in the symbol of an opening flower as if in realizing wholeness they had “come into full flower.” Together they validated experiences and discussed activities that would lead them toward making positive change. They identified needs to “exercise more”, “meditate more”, “learn to say no”, “learn something new like a hobby.” In addition, some began to make plans on how they would accomplish these goals.

Theoretical Considerations

Rogers’ principles of homeodynamics (Malinski & Barrett, 1994) provided the lens through which change and transition were viewed in this study. These principles; resonancy, helicy, and integrality, are inextricably linked and together describe the nature, direction, and mutuality of change. According to these principles, change is continuous, innovative, unpredictable, and evolutionary and is experienced within the mutual process of the human-environmental energy field. Evidence of these three principles was reflected in the patterning of the participants as well as in the process of the study.

Resonancy refers to the wave frequency patterning of the human and environmental energy fields that are always in mutual process. Resonancy describes the nature of

change. Change is continuous and always moves from lower to higher frequency pattern. Change occurring within the mutual process of the human/environmental energy fields is synchronous in rate and rhythm and the patterning of the change is not readily recognizable to the individual. That is, change is always occurring, but the individual will not necessarily be knowingly aware of its occurrence. Often when frequencies are “out of synch”, a disturbance or imbalance in the energy waves is experienced and the occurrence of change becomes known to the individual. This knowing or awareness can shift at any moment. Resonancy, or change as movement from a lower to higher wave patterning was evidenced by the participants’ descriptions of their feelings of an “inner shift”, or as “there is this inner movement-I can’t stop it, things just aren’t the same”. In their mandalas, resonancy emerged aesthetically as wavy or curly lines that were said to represent “internal chaos and confusion that couldn’t be contained”.

Integrality, or change as a continuous mutual process of the human and environmental energy fields was exemplified through participatory sharing and validation of experiences. Examples of these were dialogical engagement and interactions of the participants with themselves through mandala construction and narrative journaling, discussions with and among each other and with the researcher. Meditation prior to mandala construction and background music throughout the process enhanced the environmental field for more open interactions and receptivity to knowledge that emerged out of the mutual process of the fields. The principle of integrality helps to explain the behavioral patterning manifestations that emerge out of the mutual process (Rogers, 1992). Such manifestations may include thoughts, emotions, and actions.

Integrality was made manifest in the approach participants used in constructing their mandalas. Whether drawing from the center outward or vice-versa, how the participants drew their mandalas reflected the mutual process and the channeling of the energy of the human – environmental energy fields. Starting from the perimeter of the circle and working toward the center or the opposite focused the energy toward introspection. Beginning from the center and moving toward the perimeter attempted to free up hidden energy in an attempt to bring into emergence knowledge of the self that lies in the unconscious (Huyser, 2002)- moving from perhaps “unknowing” participation in change to “knowing” participation. The women were in mutual process with their inner and outer environments toward the goal of appreciating wholeness. As the women moved through the inquiry process their sense of wholeness as well as a sense of empowerment to direct the changes occurring in their lives became manifest. Power defined as the capacity to participate knowingly in change is embedded within integrality (Barrett, 1990). They began to plan how they would make their lives better, such as paying more attention to self-care behaviors and engaging in activities they enjoyed.

The third principle, helicy, describes the direction of change and is defined by Rogers (1992) as the continuous, innovative, unpredictable, increasing diversity of human and environmental field patterning. Implied within this principle is movement toward increasing spiritual awareness, evolving patterning, individualism, choices, and freedom from attachment to outcomes. The concept of helicy was manifested in the language of one of the participants who said, “you realize the ability to direct the change...how you end up at different places depends on your choices.” One common theme throughout the

process and for every woman was the increasing awareness of a spiritual awakening or spiritual presence in their lives. Many felt the sense of be able to “let go” of attachments to memories of past events and what they considered to be mistakes. There was a sense of moving ahead with life and an excitement in doing so. Many felt the change as a process that “wasn’t complete yet” and they could “feel the waves of the promises for the future”. All of these are manifestations that reflect of the principle of helicy.

The three principles of homeodynamics are considered to be integral dimensions of the process of change, therefore, the research study findings were examined for theoretical relevance across all three simultaneously. The integrality of these principles is evident from the process used by the women. The graphic representations in their mandalas as well as their narrative reflections denoted being at a crossroads, but not standing still. Their relative pasts, relative presents, and relative futures converged at these crossroads and is where their discernment was taking place. There was an “inner shift” of energy with confusion and chaos here (resonancy). There was total engagement with their environment and other human-environmental energy fields as well as the power to participate in positive change (integrality). There was the awareness of movement toward a higher sense of spirituality, innovation, and limitless potentials for directing their lives (helicy).

Implications of the Study

Theoretical

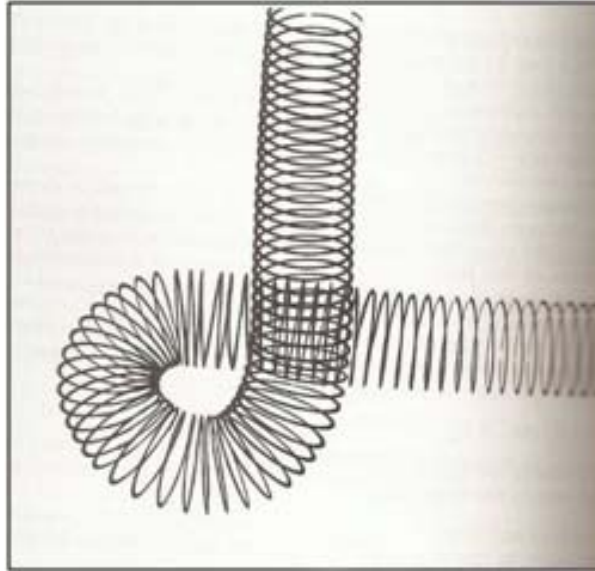
Through concept analysis using a literature review, Kralik, Visentin, and van Loon (2006) derived a definition of transition as “a process of convoluted passage where individuals redefine their sense of self and redevelop self-agency in response to disruptive life events” (p.321). In an earlier work, Chick and Meleis (1986) defined transition as a passage or movement from one life phase, status, condition, another and that is both the process and the outcomes of interactions between individuals and their environments. A later literature review by Schumaker and Meleis (1994) led to further refinement of the categories or types of transitions and were specified as developmental, based on life cycles, situational related to specific life events, and health-illness transitions related to changes in status of health. Specific to the transition of midlife, Meleis, Sawyer, Im, Messias and Schumaker (2000) suggested that the experience of transitions and responses to them are influenced by the woman’s entire life history and context of life in which she finds herself during the transition. Howell’s work (2005) supported this view on midlife transition by asserting how the way women adapted to changes in their lives was influenced by life situations.

These theories have provided insight into the phenomena of transition. Common among these theories are the themes that transition is a process that involves movement or passage from one state to another, there is an association with life’s experiences and that an individual responds to the process based on the context of his/her life’s experiences. Underlying these theories is the assumption that change/transition is a stage

to which one adapts or manages. This is consistent with the cause and effect paradigm that based on certain guidelines or criteria, change may be predicted and universal interventions created. While a faint glimpse at holism is implied initially by these theories of transition, categorizing the experiences fails to capture the wholeness and uniqueness of the human experiences of transition. The current study adds a new dimension to what is currently known about transition. Exploring transition through the lens of unitary science has made explicit the underlying wholeness inherent in human existence and the integrality of experiences that occur during transition. The outcomes of this study raise the possibility of unitary theory of transition.

This study created the time and space for the participants to actively engage in a process of knowing participation in change. By observing this process the researcher was able to observe and identify the principle of helicy in action and to suggest the potential for a unitary theory of transition. In her early work, Rogers (1992) used a slinky to illustrate helicy and the description of change as unpredictable with movement toward evolution and innovation.

Figure 33. Helicy, Rogers, 1992



But what then is transition? If transition is a process of change, and if change is continuous process, why not call it transition? Rogers referred to punctualism in reference to change. She indicated that, while continuous, change is not gradual, rather it occurs with differing frequencies and is marked throughout space-time by periods of rapid and chaotic movement and non-equilibrium (Rogers, 1992). Referring to the slinky in Figure 12, it is suggested that transition is represented by the chaotic appearing area where the longitudinal and vertical axes converge. This does not imply that change is repetitive, being inconsistent with the unitary perspective. What this area may represent is a space and time where pandimensionality is experienced intensely. This is where the memories of experiences of the past and the potentials for the future meet within the relative present. Rising awareness and consciousness of change occur during these periods and it is out of these periods that innovation and evolution occur. Transitions are

the periods of chaos and non-equilibrium where there is a shift in awareness. This shift allows for new potentialities for participating in change and directing one's life; perhaps a form of power as described by Barrett (1990). Suggested here is that this area correlates with the experience of being at a crossroads in their journeys explicated by the women in this study. This is the area where discernment occurs, the choice to participate in the change is made, and the power to do so is realized.

Practical

This study provided an opportunity for women to explore the process of midlife transition in a unique and holistic way that captured the natural progression and evolution of life beyond the biomedical-psychosocial perspective. Although, women entered the study with a sense of fragmentation, there was not a tendency toward essentializing their experiences or relegating them to societal norms. As an observer and participant in the process, the researcher was witness to a transformative process as women came into realization and appreciation of their wholeness. The results of those observations have led to conclusions regarding strategies that will provide women with alternative ways of viewing and moving through the transitional process of midlife.

Creating intentional space and time for women to explore their experiences is key to the transformative process. In this study, this was accomplished through aromatherapy, meditation, music, and engaging in mandala construction and being present. In addition, the appreciative group inquiry process created the space and time for sharing and validation of experiences while appreciating the uniqueness of others. The explorative

stance of the individual and group process freed the women from the burden of any expected outcomes other than the uncovering of new knowledge.

Understanding transition as points of departure or as opportunities for directing change is important to individuals, but has significance in nursing practice as well. Nurses interact with patients/clients during times of transition. Nurses who understand transition viewed through this unitary lens will be able to assist their clients in making sense of their transitions and in recognizing their own power to direct the changes that are occurring.

One of the most powerful outcomes of the study for this researcher was the realization I had been using unitary appreciative inquiry throughout my many years of nursing practice. Fortunate that I was taught to assume wholeness in human beings, I recall only a rare instance when I viewed patients as fragmented or identified them by their disease or condition. Now I recognize that my openness to the uniqueness of patients, their situations and the contexts of their lives was unitary appreciative inquiry made manifest. Unitary appreciative inquiry is how I used the nursing process in caring for my patients and clients. There is some implication that the assumptions underlying this method of inquiry be incorporated into how and what is taught in nursing education related to the nursing process. That is, unitary appreciative inquiry is a way of being with and engaging patients in directing their own care toward optimization of their health potential.

Empirical

The study expands current knowledge of human development through a unitary worldview that is non-linear. It supports the view of a life process that is in continuous and dynamic change and is moving toward innovative and evolutionary actualization. In addition, it responds to a call for more innovative research methodologies aimed at holism. While not a primary aim of the study, the ultimate goal in unitary patterning appreciation is appreciating the wholeness inherent in human life. This wholeness becomes manifest in human experiences, perceptions, and expressions (Cowling, 2000). Women moved from a sense of fragmentation to wholeness while engaged in this study and provided evidence for future studies with women in midlife transition specific to Cowling's theory of unitary healing. As men are usually considered more linear in their ways of knowing, using a unitary appreciative inquiry method to study their experiences might provide new insights into the patterning of their midlife transitions.

Limitations of the Study

The sample size of ten (10) might be considered a limiting factor for this study. However, it was purposive and considered to be of adequate size to ensure the richness of responsiveness needed for an in-depth inquiry. The focus on women and their experiences might also be considered to be limiting. However, it was not the aim of the study to be able to draw gender neutral conclusions regarding midlife transitions. Finally, the theoretical focus of the study is unitary in nature and employs a specific methodology which may not be considered appropriate for other studies. However, the focus of this

study was on patterning appreciation which required a unitary framework. A potential limitation of the study relates to the process itself. Because of the length of the process and the time commitment required of the participant, there is the potential for attrition. Given the preferred small sample size for this type study, there is always the risk of lack of richness in the data based on number of participants.

Relevance to Nursing

The relevance of this study for nursing is three-fold. It provides a positive contribution to nursing science as it adds to the growing body of knowledge concerning the importance of maintaining nursing's historical attention on the wholeness, health, and well-being of people as its unique role in society. As described, the study findings featured theoretical, practical, and empirical knowledge that when integrated suggest new possibilities for helping women positively approach midlife as an opportunity for self-reflection and growth. It is grounded in a theory of wholeness. It reflected the principle of giving credibility to the perspectives of women in midlife as co-participants in an inquiry process. It generated practical knowledge that can serve to advance the well-being and health of women in their midlife years and beyond. The adherence to methods congruent with the focus on the life patterning of women produced legitimate findings that may be useful to nursing researchers and practitioners. The features of this study are consonant with the values and philosophy of holistic nursing, and respond favorably to the needs of society to provide strategies for improving the lives of women that go beyond the biomedical perspective of health.

Second, this study draws attention to the lives of women and to understanding the fullness and richness of their lives as a whole. Understanding the wholeness of women's lives is a worthwhile endeavor for nursing because predominant theoretical models resort to limiting the focus of inquiry and knowledge development. Nursing has a critical interest in shaping its practice in response to the wholeness of the lives of women to overcome the shortcomings of biomedical paradigms and interests. Nurses are placed in professional roles that require them to respond to the health challenges of women. Most nurses have come to understand that health is intimately intertwined with all aspects of women's lives. Many nurses, including myself, whose practices touch the lives of women have experienced the shortcomings of the biomedical modes in addressing the health concerns of women. This study was developed and implemented with the intention of bringing the focus of attention directly upon the comprehensiveness and breadth of women's lives that go beyond signs and symptoms of change. This focused attention resulted in offering useful and more holistic information to nurses involved in caring for women.

Finally, this study sheds light on the possibilities of bringing women together who are experiencing common phenomena associated with midlife. Nurses are currently positioned in society being asked to provide meaningful services to people in efficient and effective ways while adhering to complex and inclusive standards of care. This study demonstrates that bringing women together in a focused, systematic, and participatory way results in the creation of a variety of forms of knowledge – theoretical, practical, and empirical – in an efficient way. Further, this approach to inquiry takes fully into account

the capabilities of women to individually and collaboratively advance their understanding of their own life conditions. The women in this study were able to use the inquiry to promote their own health and well-being. This is the type of approach that has a functional value for nurses who are trying to create conditions for change across large numbers of clients.

Implications for nursing practice

Most women will enter and move through the time in their life considered to be midlife and many will experience it within the context of a biomedical healthcare system. The design of this study allowed women to explore their midlives going beyond what a biomedical perspective could offer. It enabled women to expand what is known from a normative perspective about midlife into the uniqueness of individual lives. When the study is considered in its entirety, including its purpose, design, and findings, it offers some critical insights for nurses dealing with the health of women.

To enhance their therapeutic communication with women in midlife, nurses could benefit from opening up to women's perspectives about this transitional process. In doing so nurses can raise awareness and consciousness that will help women experience the transition as a normal process rather than a period of chaos. In addition, nurses engaged in this type of inquiry using an aesthetic approach to expression of self knowledge, such as the mandala, assist patients in finding the meaning to normal life events. This approach adds to knowledge about the impact of developing self-awareness as a nursing strategy for promoting health in women experiencing midlife transition.

A goal of nursing is the betterment of human existence and specifically to assist patients/clients in optimizing their health. Participative Unitary Appreciative Inquiry (PAUI), though mostly thought of as a research methodology, is in actuality a way of being with and engaging human beings. Thought of in this way, PAUI may provide a framework within which nurses can better interact with their patients. When nurses view their interactions with patients through the PUAI lens, it allows them to assist patients in realizing their potential and power to participate and direct their lives toward optimal health. For nurses to use PAUI in this way, requires a re-thinking of the nursing process that reflects a more unitary view.

Assessment becomes appreciation of the whole patient within the contexts and situations of life and involves being with and engaging the patient in the process. Planning of care becomes participatory as patient and nurse work together to explore and make sense of the information that emerges out of engagement. This would include all data, subjective, objective, contextual, and situational, that has relevance with the patient. Interventions emerge out of the synoptic process of making sense of the information and identifying actions that will move the patient in a positive direction toward change. It requires being open to options and opportunities that emerge from the synoptic viewing of data. Evaluation becomes transformation as the patient gains a greater understanding of his/her condition of existence, develops an increased awareness of self-agency, and becomes engaged in activities that will direct the change toward better health.

Implications for nursing research

Based on the findings of this study, future nursing research is suggested. First of all, replication of this study using women from different geographical areas and diverse populations is needed to validate and strengthen the findings of this study. The development of a middle - range unitary theory of transition is proposed. This theory would be grounded in the science of unitary human beings and would define transition as a unitary process and condition of human existence and as a “place” where individuals find their power to participate and direct the changes in their lives. Multiple studies using anyone who identifies being in transition without regard to gender, sexual orientation, cultural, or ethnic background would be required to further test and develop this middle-range theory.

From a research-related-to-practice standpoint, another area that warrants investigation is midlife transition in women and its relationship to nurse burnout. We know that as women in the nursing workforce age, they begin to experience burnout and leave the work force. Exploring the life patterning of women nurses in midlife transition who also identify with burnout might provide further insights into the phenomenon of burnout. Participative unitary appreciative participatory inquiry might serve to advance knowledge about the relationship of being a nurse to the broader and deeper context of life patterning.

Summary

Of the current population, almost 40% of the female population in the United States is considered to be in midlife. Midlife transition is viewed primarily in the western world through a biomedical lens. This view refers to this period in women's lives in its entirety as menopause having three distinct stages. The experiences of women during this period are categorized within one of the stages; pre-menopause, menopause, and post-menopause, based upon symptoms that represent changes occurring within the hormonal environment. Symptoms, whether physiological, psychological, or spiritual are attributed to fluctuations in hormonal levels that occur during this period in a woman's life. This linear view of development is pervasive in today's society and creates a fragmented framework within which women have come to view their midlife experiences. However, while women may have come to view their experiences within this framework, they have an inner knowing there is more to their transition than just symptoms. They seek knowledge from books, friends, and health care providers that fail to provide adequate information related to the woman's unique experiences.

This study created a unique opportunity for women to explore midlife in a holistic way that validated the personal and unique dimensions of midlife transition for the women involved. These women gained knowledge about the midlife process and it allowed them to expand their understanding beyond the fragmentation of the medical sciences. They acknowledged an awareness of changes in their physical appearances. They realized the acute juxtaposition of dichotomous emotions. They recognized an increase in spiritual awareness as they explored their purpose in life. However,

throughout this unitary process, they realized all of these dimensions of their lives were inseparable as they discovered their wholeness. Within the wholeness these women realized their potential growth and evolution toward optimization, rather than succumbing to the message of current hegemony of menopause as a disease of decline. They discovered the ability to move into their futures with the power to participate in the changes that were occurring.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval




THE UNIVERSITY of NORTH CAROLINA
GREENSBORO

OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE
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Federalwide Assurance (FWA) #216

To: William Cowling
Community Practice
101 320 McIver Street

From: UNCG IRB


Authorized signature on behalf of IRB

Approval Date: 8/31/2009
Expiration Date of Approval: 8/30/2010

RE: Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)
Submission Type: Initial
Expedited Category: 7. Surveys/interviews/focus groups
Study #: 09-0262

Study Title: Life Patterning of Women in Midlife Transition

This submission has been approved by the IRB for the period indicated. It has been determined that the risk involved in this research is no more than minimal.

Study Description:

This is a descriptive, exploratory study of the life patterning of women in the process of midlife transition.

Investigator's Responsibilities

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

When applicable, enclosed are stamped copies of approved consent documents and other recruitment materials. You must copy the stamped consent forms for use with subjects unless you have approval to do otherwise.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be implemented (use the modification application available at <http://www.uncg.edu/orc/irb.htm>). Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB using the "Unanticipated Problem/Event" form at the same website.

CC: Nancy Scroggs, School Of Nursing

Appendix B

IRB Approved Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM

Project Title: Life Patterning of Women in Midlife Transition

Project Director: W. R. Cowling III

Participant's Name: _____

What is the study about?

This study is about what it is like to be in midlife transition. For those women who think they are in the transition of midlife this study provides an opportunity for them to talk about their experiences both individually and in a group. This approach explores life patterning of women in midlife transition. Life patterning for this study is defined as experiences of midlife transition appreciated within the context of women's lives.

Why are you asking me?

You are being asked to participate in the study because you consider yourself to be in midlife transition, have shown interest in a shared research study about midlife transition by responding to an advertisement, flyer, or have been referred to the study by another participant.

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

There will be four phases of data collection beginning with the initial individual interview lasting approximately 2 hours, followed by two 6 hour group sessions, and a follow-up session by mail, email, or telephone. Each phase will be separated by 2-3 week intervals. Phase One is conducted with only the researcher and participant present and follows after informed consents are signed. If you agree to participate and you meet the study criteria; you will be given the dates of the Phase Two and Phase Three of the study and the location (with directions) where they will take place. Phases two and three are group sessions.

In the first three phases of the study you will be asked create an image (mandala) on paper or other materials that represents certain aspects of your experience of midlife transition. You will be asked to describe what the mandala represents to you and to write about its meaning in a journal provided for you. You will also be asked to provide feedback about the accuracy of the researcher's summaries of the data generated from your journals, notes taken during discussion, and the researcher's observations of the process. During Phases Two and Three, you will be asked to share information from those summaries with the group. At Phase Three you will be asked to participate in exploring common themes from the summaries related to midlife transition and to create a final group mandala that represents the group experience of midlife transition. Once completed you will participate in group interpretation of the mandala and be asked to write your own reflections in your journal. In Phase Four, after the researcher has compiled and summarized all the information generated, you will be sent a narrative summary from Phase Three. You will be asked to respond by telephone, email or mail, as to the accuracy of the narrative and/or to revise it as you see fit. You will also be asked to respond to a question regarding your overall experience of the study.

UNCG IRB
Approved Consent Form

Valid 8-31-09 to 8-30-10

Is there any audio/video recording?

No portion of the study will be recorded in any fashion.

What are the dangers to me?

There is the possibility of mild anxiety related to discussion of midlife experiences, particularly in the group phase of the project. You will be encouraged throughout the study to do what you need to do in order to feel comfortable. The setting for the study is especially chosen in order to offer opportunities to take breaks as needed in a relaxed and beautiful atmosphere. You always have the option to withdraw from the study if needed.

If you have any concerns about your rights or how you are being treated please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research and Compliance at UNCG at (336) 256-1482.

The principal investigator and director for this research project is W. Richard Cowling, RN, PhD. If you have any questions about the project, or your benefits or risks associated with being in this study, you may contact him at (336) 334-4785. In addition the student researcher, Nancy Scroggs, RN, PhD, may be reached at (336)-262-2223 or by email at nhscrogg@uncg.edu.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

You may gain a benefit from participation by being given the opportunity to explore midlife transition in a holistic way that validates the personal and uniqueness of those experiences. You may experience an increased understanding of your own midlife process, greater insight into your life and experiences, and may be better able to direct the changes occurring during this transition. You will also learn about mandala construction.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

The potential benefits to society from this study may include (1) increased understanding of the process of midlife transition for women, and (2) generation of a form of knowledge that will extend what is currently known from the health care and medical sciences regarding midlife transition in women.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

You will not be paid for participation in the study, but will be given a gift (\$20.00 gift card from Target) after completing each full day of study. In addition, you will receive lunch and snacks on the two full days of the study. You will be responsible for arranging your transportation to the study site. In addition, the study will cost you time which is two full days plus the time of the follow-up interview which will be done by phone, email, or mail and should take no more than 10-15 minutes.

How will you keep my information confidential?

All information and data will be kept stored separately from identifying data. This means that information you write in your journal or talk about during individual or group sessions will not be linked to any information that reveals your true identity. Because this study involves group discussion, your anonymity cannot be maintained. You will be asked to create a false name that only you know, but which will be used to link all your data. When the results of the study are reported and/or published, you will not be identified by your real name. Any material such as quotations related to or photos of the artistic presentations will be de-identified as possible. In the case of photographed copies of the individual artistic representations, no material will be released for publication without your written consent. In the case of the group artistic creation, no material will be released without the consent of every group member. All paper copies of data will be kept

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in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. Also data will be typed and stored in a password protected computer in the researcher's home office, and there will be no access to patient health records in this study. Data will be stored for 5 years, at which time it will be shredded or destroyed. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. If you choose to do follow-up by email, absolute confidentiality of data through the internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. Artistic creations and journals will not be identified by name, therefore are not considered identifiable data.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form, you agree that you understand the procedures and any risks and benefits involved in this research. You have had the research method explained to you by the researcher to your satisfaction. You understand that you are completely free to refuse or to withdraw your consent to participate in this research at any time without penalty or prejudice; your participation is entirely voluntary. Your privacy will be protected because you will not be identified by name as a participant in this project. You agree not to divulge any information about the identification of other participants in the study group. You understand there is no way to insure that other participant group members will not divulge any information outside the group, thus confidentiality cannot be completely assured.

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Nancy Scroggs.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____

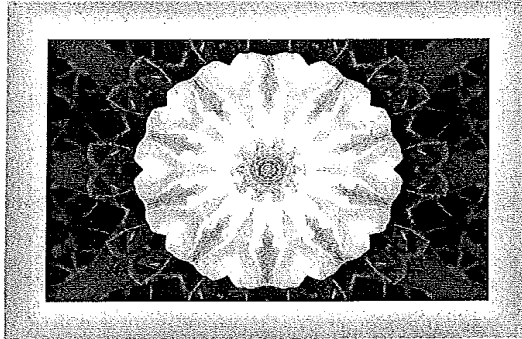
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Appendix C

Recruitment Flyer

ARE YOU A WOMAN IN MIDLIFE TRANSITION?



WOULD YOU LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN A WOMEN'S RESEARCH STUDY TO EXPLORE YOUR EXPERIENCE OF MIDLIFE TRANSITION?

Midlife transition is a process of living that most every woman will experience in her lifetime. Many women think of it as a time in their lives between being a younger or older adult when multiple changes are occurring. This study will allow women experiencing midlife transition to share and explore their experiences both individually and in a participatory group of women.

There will be 10 -12 women in the group. You will be asked to come to one individual session lasting about two hours and two group sessions each lasting a full day. Each session will be held approximately 2-3 weeks apart in the Greensboro area. I will phone you within two weeks after the final session to get your responses to study findings. For each of the two days you attend the group sessions you will be given lunch and a \$20.00 gift card.

In order to be part of this study, you must be over 18 years of age, consider yourself to be in the process of midlife transition, have transportation to the study site, speak, read, and write English, and have telephone or email access.

If interested & for more information

CONTACT

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W. Richard Cowling, RN, PhD (principal investigator)
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
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Appendix D

Telephone Interview Script

Pre-Study Telephone Script and Interview Guide

Life Patterning of Women in Midlife Transition

Thank you for your interest in being a participant in the research study, Life Patterning of Women in Midlife Transition. This study provides the opportunity for women to talk about their experiences of midlife transition and to share their stories. As a result of the study, the women who participate will have a new understanding of this life process. Also, the results will provide health care practitioners with new knowledge of the process.

The study will require that you come to three different sessions with the researcher. The first time you will meet individually with the researcher for the purpose of getting more detailed information about the study, to sign appropriate consents, and to engage in an activity that begins the exploration of your midlife experience. The activity involves expressing your thoughts and feelings about the midlife process through drawing and journal writing. You do not have to know how to draw to participate in the study. The activities done in the next two sessions will be similar to the first, but will be done in a group of 10 to 12 women. While the first session will take approximately two (2) hours, the second and third sessions will each last approximately six (6) hours. Lunch and snacks will be provided on those days, but you will need to provide your own transportation to the study. The final session will be a follow-up by telephone or email and will last approximately 30 minutes.

In order to be considered eligible for the study there are certain criteria that must be met. If you are interested in continuing as a potential participant will you please answer the following questions?

1. Are you over 18 years of age?
2. Do you consider yourself to be in the process of midlife transition?
3. Will you have transportation to the study site?
4. Are you able to read, to write and to speak English?
5. Do you have access to email and/or telephone?

**Researcher use only:

Name:

Phone:

Appointment given: Date:

Time

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Appendix E
Demographic Form

Life Patterning of Women in Midlife Transition
Brief Demographic Survey

Please write your responses to the questions below. Cross out any questions you do not want to answer.

What is your current age?

To what ethnic group do you belong?

What type of educational experiences have you had as an adult?

Are you currently under medical treatment for any health issue?

If you are employed outside the home, what type of work do you do?

Appendix F

Meditation Script

Relaxation Induction Script

Life Patterning of Women in Midlife Transition

Make yourself comfortable and close your eyes...Put your hands gently on your lower abdomen, just below your naval.... Bring all your attention to the sensations in your hands...Notice the slight rise and fall of your hands as they move with your breathing... notice the tactile sensations of the surfaces of your hands and fingers... Bring all your awareness into these sensations...(pause). Now notice the temperature of your hands...(pauses). Notice their weight...(pause). Now notice any sensations inside the skin, perhaps tingling or pulsing...(pause). Now bring your attention to the center of your chest and be aware of the sensations... notice the movement of your chest with each breath... the passage of breath into your lungs... the tactile sensations of your skin... perhaps an awareness of your heartbeat...(pause). Now bring your awareness to your nose and be aware of your breath passing through your nostrils.... Notice the slight cool sensations of the air touching the inside of your nose.

Continue to breath slowly an deeply, and as you begin to feel more relaxed... going into a deeper place within...feeling deeply relaxed...peaceful and safe... let yourself become aware of a sense of not being alone...with you now is your guide who is wise and is always concerned with your well being. Let yourself begin to see this wise being with whom you can share your fears and your joys. You have a trust in this wise being.

If you do not see anyone, let yourself be aware of hearing or feeling this wise being, noticing the presence of care and concern. In whatever way seems best for you, proceed to make contact with this wise inner guide. Let yourself establish contact with your guide now... in any way that comes. Your guide may appear to you in any form, such as person, an animal, an inner presence or peace.. or as an image of the very wisest part of you.

Notice the love and wisdom with which you are surrounded. This wisdom and love are present for you now... now let yourself ask the question, "What is midlife to me?"... Be receptive to what emerges... let yourself receive some new information. Do not judge or filter what comes forth... listen with openness and pure intention to receive... allow yourself to look at what midlife is to you... tell your guide anything you wish.... Listen to the answers that emerge.....(PAUSE)

Now when you are ready.....and only when you are ready.....bring closure to the visit with your guide... you can come back here anytime that you wish.... All you have to do is take the time.....

The Drawing

While relaxed and comfortable, create an image that represents what midlife is to you...allow the image or images to flow from within..drawings can be realistic or symbolic.. the most important thing is to express yourself in a non-logical way.. do not judge your drawing...if you find yourself too focused on the result of the drawing exercise, use your non-dominant hand.....draw with your eyes closed...Notice the energy flow from you...let your body energy resonate with your imagery and spirit energy...let the energies slowly begin to resonate together. Do not try to control the process, because this inner quality comes from being immersed in the imagery and drawing experience....Allow an image to form on your paper that represents your feelings and thoughts at this particular moment in time.... Choose colors that speak to you...If you want to change colors, feel free to do so.....

After the drawing:

View the drawing from different perspectives. Mark with a small “t” the top of the drawing.

In your journal, reflect on your creation: How does this creation represent midlife to me?(How does this creation represent how you know you are in midlife transition? And How does this creation represent what it is like to be a woman in midlife?) What new awareness or insights came to mind as you reflect on the details of your images?

List the colors chosen and used....then write a few words of what each color says to you

Appendix G

Mandala Color/Symbol Reference Chart

Color Chart for Mandala Interpretation Life Patterning of Women in Midlife Transition					
Colors	Kellogg (2002)	Fincher (1991)	Chakra System (Huyser, 2002)	Native American (Huyser, 2002)	Other
Red	“will to thrive”	Sign of life; power of healing; arousal or alerting; sacrifice; color of blood; Fire of transformation; marks way to enlightenment; Masculinity as in Mars; energy needed to survive, healthy, ad transformative Or wound, destruction , rage;	Rooted in and conscious of the body	Sacred inner fire	When blended with other colors—energy present but bound up in symbology of color with which it is blended.; Warmth, lust blood assertiveness, intense emotions; spirituality, transformation (Cox and Muller, 2009)
Orange	Ambivalent feelings about maleness and ego strivings	Symbolizes power; Energy tempered by insight, understanding, thought; deepening one’s spiritual understanding thru misfortune, rejection, alienation; sometime symbol for outcast; energy invested in relationship to the father; energetic striving, strong sense of identity, healthy assertiveness; OR hostile attitude toward authority, willful use of power, no self-discipline	Sexuality and relationships		Identified with entropy, autumn, sunsets

Yellow	Development of consciousness, awareness of self; and individuality; if predominates or overly bright= inflation; might hide the shadow, or dark, black opposite; darkened yellow- attachment to father; good clean yellow; good relationship with father	“our ability to ‘see’” Imagery of light as a source of life; masculine –symbol of the father.. In women may represent the animus; robust energetic, well defined sense of self. See things clearly, set realistic goals, : ready to learn something new pursue some new project	Energy, power, emotions	Sacred fire of self-actualization- the capacity to actualize the creator’s intention through the individual’s right action; illumination	Jung (1972)intuition: to grasp a pattern of meaning in a scatter of facts and impressions
Green	Archetypal parents in harmony (serves as one’s own parent); seen in mandalas in those in helping professions; ability to nurture and protect; to care for oneself and others: too much” overly controlled by internalized values of parents, rigidity, overtendency to overcare for overpossess, overprotect other people.	Color of nature; growing; cyclical natural world; harmony; symbolic of mother nature herself; Power of life to heal, create, renew itself	Unconditional love and compassion	Innocence of being close to nature, trusting , knowing one’ own heart; cherish loved ones in a natural accepting way	Jung(1972): associated with Sensing function

Blue	Represents the place where one is completely and utterly supported and cared for “uterine environment:	Clear sky, water, cool shadows; calmness, serenity, peace. Relaxation; water symbols-death and resurrection., transformation; Jungian function “Thinking”; mothering; unconditional love if light=engulfing devouring if darker	Creativity, speaking, inner listening	Sacred fire of intention	Height and depth; Tradition, devotion, and lasting values
Indigo	May suggest difficult experiences in infancy-lots of it perhaps deep rooted conflicts with mother	Inner darkness; the unconscious, sleep death OR awakening of intuition, attainment of wisdom; feeling of confusion, depression loss; to see beyond cycle of death/rebirth to timeless reality beyond visible forms	Third eye, clairvoyance, and intuition		
Purple	Negative aspects: self-absorption and vision of oneself above or beyond the human condition; may symbolize persecution or paranoia	Sign of life, mixture of red and blue; blend of energy and serenity; spirituality; sacrifice and sublimation of personal drives in the service of spirituality; Lenten season; change & transformation; personal growth; “restless motive energy of something seeking to become free at some level; vivid imagination; ability to generate excitement	Link with cosmic enlightenment; ecstasy		
Gold					Sun, completeness; high stage of spiritual development, Male energy (Huyser, 2002)
Silver					Moon as mirroring, sheen of night, protective element against negative forces; Female energy (Huyser, 2002)

Lavender	Excessive use in mandala may indicate dependency on fantasy and escape from reality; conditions of oxygen deprivation; respiratory illness; ;memory of a birth experience that was oxygen deprived; the emphasis is on the spiritual nature represented by lavender	Pale, yet intense, virtue, industry, acknowledgement, nervous system function, “symbolizing energy in a highly refined state of spirituality; proclivity for mystical experiences; spiritual awakening toward possible psychological rebirth; Negative-dissociation from physical body			
Pink	Physical body; tender, sensitive tissues, organs, muscles most responsive to emotional stress; admission of vulnerability, fear of exposure, need for caring; physical symptoms due to illness or stress, maybe unrecognized by the person, women in menses, color of flesh	Robust innocence, sensuality, emotions, youth, symbol of resurrection; health my need attention; feminine color; may direct you t look for what is new and in need of protection in yourself			Child in us; love, tenderness and need for protection

Magenta		Vitality, excitement, restlessness; individualistic, bold, dynamic; women establishing autonomy; identifying their vocation; enlarging their world view; taking action while remaining grounded in their true feminine nature; readiness to undertake a course of study, initiate a creative project, or voice your own opinions; motivation, focus, liveliness; Negative- egotism, impatience, loss of focus in excess emotionally			
Peach		Sensuous pleasure; female genitalia; responsiveness of the mature adult; sexuality; ready for a rich and meaningful relationship; female-coming of age; release of generative potentials within the psyche; compulsive indulgences; presences of feminine energy generated from the hidden depths of one's being			
Brown	If in the center of the mandala-low self esteem, feels worthless and dirty; Maroon-feelings associated with sexual identity; energy buried or tied up-low opinion of self, blocked energy	Fertile soils; fields harvested and ready for planting; renunciation, sorrow, penitence, trustworthiness, being stuck between the impulse to go and inhibition not to go; conflicted relationship with mother; passive receptivity; re-examine old wounds that may need attention to heal; seen in mandalas created during fall of the year or end of a life cycle; opportunities for new beginnings		Domesticity, maternal, enveloping effect; color of earth, autumn, and wood; grounding ,sobriety, penance, conflict; possibly low self-esteem; blocked energy	

Turquoise		Appears when healing is necessary in order to get on with your life; may need to distance self from painful events; psyche is trying to control the flow of memories which might be too painful; capacity of the psyche to heal in ways not understood, tendency to resist emotion, fearing deeper unconscious imagery it might arouse; statement of traditional mothering being redirected to care for oneself		Adornment, wards off evil eye; brings good health; offering to deities; halts unwelcome flow of ghosts through openings	
Gray	Seen in mandalas of addicts as drug abuse causes all sensations positive and negative to fade away	Atonement, depression, inertia, indifference, wisdom, introspection, relativism, balance of opposite; lack of feeling; stand for stone, define sacred space, discovering some new insight into the paradox of human existence-glimpsing possibility of wholeness, finding restful middle ground on some troublesome moral issue; OR cutting off your feelings		Neutrality; wisdom, transitional area between the known and the unknown	
Black				Darkness and death; self-limiting; absence of consciousness; depression, sorrow, fear, mourning, intangible, contains the expectation of something new; vulnerability, opportunity to integrate one's shadow with Self	

White			Cosmic, enlightenment; ecstasy		Nothingness, transcendent perfection, purity; indicates the awakening “I”; part of mandala left white- readiness for inner change (Cox & Muller, 2009)
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